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1891

SCENES IN OUR PARISH.



SCENES IN OUR PARISH.

BY A

"COUNTRY PARSON'S" DAUGHTER.

"Needs no show of mountain hoary,
.Winding shore, or deepening glen,
Where the landscape in its glory,
Teaches truth to wandering men.
Give true hearts but earth and sky,
And some flowers to bloom and die;
Homely scenes and simple views,
Lowly thoughts may best infuse."

KEBLE'S CHRISTIAN YEAR



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INTRODUCTION.

“But is amusement all? Studios of song,
And yet ambitious not to sing in vain;
I would not trifle merely, though the world
Be loudest in their praise, who do no more.”

COWPER.

MY little book is nearly finished, and I am told I need write an introduction for it. But who are you, gentle reader, to whom I must introduce myself? You must be at leisure just now, or you would scarcely think of spending an hour on a first volume, written by a nameless author. Common civility expects me to thank you for your condescension; and to express a hope that I may render the time we shall pass together, in some degree, agreeable.

Do you love the country? Thither I will wander with you; not, indeed, through such scenery as our native land *can* show, in some of

its most favoured retreats : I may gaze with you, on the silver mirror of no Rydal lake ; I can take you to no Walla Crag ; nor, southward to the Gothic ruin, where the grass grows in the deserted aisles ; and the ivy hangs in heavy wreathes round the arches, which once echoed gloriously to the Te Deum, as the music pealed from the vaulted roof, and stole over the placid Wye : I can linger with you in no such silent and beautiful wood walks ; and I may pause on no such height with you as the cliff at Piercefield : yet, come with me. “ God made the country ;” here are wild flowers, and clear waters, such as none but God could make : and for the stories connected with our walks ;—Can you stoop to the common concerns of life ? For if you enjoy nothing but romance and glowing fiction, I forewarn you that we had better part ;—I never saw a knight, or a lady,—a titled lady I mean,—in my life ; and the fairies of our forest forsook their haunts here, in the same day on which the first coal-pit was opened.

But have you a heart that can sympathise

with human hearts, that throb, and ache, and flutter, as itself has done? Can you feel for sojourners here, who know the wear and tear of this "work-day world," as you have known it? Will you take interest in the recital of

"Familiar matter of to-day,

* * * * *
Some natural sorrow, grief, or pain,
Which has been, and may be again."

Above all, do you like to observe God's ways, the book of his nature and the lines of his providence? Then let us ponder over the mysterious pages together; and if we bring to the perusal, simple hearts, however dim our eyes may be, I doubt not, we shall study them with profit.

It is needless for me to ask, What your principles are? If you do not like me the better for my title-page, I candidly advise you to close my book. I do not say thus, I trust in haughtiness; in times like the present,

"Oh! what have I to do with pride?"

but because I feel, that I have not the ability to combat *your* principles, and *my own* will admit of no compromise.

Are we agreed then, thus far? Yes; and I hear you ask me, Why I wrote? To that question, I simply answer, because in a life of much leisure and much retirement, it has been my greatest pleasure to do so. Hitherto, it has never been anything but an amusement, a relaxation from duties and employments, all pleasant in their way, but not one half so pleasant as this. But you add, Why do you publish? A deservedly popular writer, (I do not remember her exact words, but this, I am sure, is her meaning,) says, "All women who publish, do so, either for money or fame." It would not become me to say, she is wrong: you cannot expect me to say, she is right; attribute to me which motive you please. But as I allow you thus much, believe me when I add, that having written, and having published; I humbly and earnestly trust that some advantage, far beyond either fame or riches, may arise, both to the

writer and the reader. It will be so, if I should be made the means of directing any one eye to that light which is from above ; or any heart to that " peace which passeth all understanding." Is it possible that so weak and contemptible an agent, should be so honoured ? Yes !—

" All is in his hand, whose praise I seek,—

* * * * *

Whose frown can disappoint the proudest strain,

Whose approbation, prosper even mine."

AN OLD COUPLE.

John Anderson! my Jo! John! we climb'd the hill thegither,
And many a canny day, John! we had with ane anither;
Now we maun totter down, John! but hand in hand we'll go,
And we'll sleep thegither at the foot, John Anderson! my Jo!

BURNS.

PERHAPS in times so prolific as the present, in all that genius and fancy produce, gorgeous or lovely, the very simplicity of an unadorned story like mine, may render it valuable by way of contrast—as the green leaves of the jessamine, themselves scentless and unvarnished, render

“ More conspicuous, and illumine more
The bright profusion of her scattered stars.”

This much I have said, I suppose, by way of apology for my boldness in at-

tempting to write at all; and now I will go on to my tale.

The old man, for whom the prayers of the congregation were desired last Sunday, we missed from his seat in the aisle, only when illness, (his last illness certainly it will be,) confined him to his bed; and until then, in fair or foul weather, sunshine or shower, as regularly as Sunday came, you were sure to see blind Samuel feeling his way, up the rough lane and across the green, to the half opened church-yard gate. Latterly, indeed, he came with very feeble steps, and but for the good natured, though rather rough assistance of some of our school-boys, would sometimes perhaps have been obliged to stop short of his journey's end; but his inoffensive and orderly conduct made him a general favourite; and when once he was within the church, many a friendly hand was willingly offered to lead him round the corner, and up to

his accustomed seat; for, in a Christian congregation, how could it be otherwise?—every one was interested for the poor old man; they saw that he was weak and blind, and they knew that he was childless. He had no decent countryman for a son, on whose arm he might lean; no neat, gentle daughter; not even one little rosy grandchild, just old enough to be trusted to “lead grandfather to church, and to sit quiet till it was time to lead him back again.” No!—poor Samuel came alone. It was his old wife’s pleasure, and nearly her whole business on Saturday, to provide for his decent appearance at church. His blindness prevented him from knowing how many necessities she wanted herself, but he always had a pair of warm worsted stockings, clean and thoroughly mended; and one of his two shirts (for his wardrobe could boast no larger supply) was always made ready on Saturday: and early on Sunday morning,

she brought down from the carved chest, where they are deposited, as carefully as if they were last year's purchases, his curious chintz waistcoat, with long sleeves—I never saw but this one of the sort—and his blue coat with very large buttons, which my reader may suppose is a curiosity too, for it was bought more than eight-and-forty years ago. And Hester used to be well pleased when she brushed it, to see how decent her old man—so she generally calls him—looked in it still; but as she reached him the oaken stick, which had been his companion for many years, it has grieved her to think, that blind and feeble as he was, he could have no other support and guide; and she often wept, as she opened the hatch to him and wished him a blessing on his way, that her own still greater infirmities prevented her from accompanying him: labour and trouble have bowed her down, so that, like the woman in the gospel, “she can in no wise

lift up herself." But she has fulfilled her duty to him well, and her pleasant task is almost done. He will come up to church no more, as she told me the other day, till he is carried thither; and in the mean time though grace may be given him to show, as the poet and philosopher did, "in what peace a Christian can die,"* there are sad hours of wasting and weariness for him to undergo, and very heavy days of toil and watching; and I am afraid, notwithstanding the parish allowance, and the kindness of friends—of want and privation for poor Hester.

But allow me to fancy that you are accompanying me in my walk, my kind reader, and as we go along I will tell you some particulars of their simple story. We will turn down this lane, then, on the north side of the church. I am told that this is not a pleasant walk, and I believe it, for those who have told me so are

* Addison.

judges; yet if we go out in a mood to be pleased, we generally find something to admire, and I at least—for I am not very wise—always find much to wonder at.

Stop one moment, before we descend the hill. What a lovely gleam of autumn sun-shine bursts across the opposite woods! How distinctly the beautiful forms of the old trees are outlined, and what a splendid variety of tint and shadowing there is still exhibited, even at this late period of the year! Oh! there are lovely walks in those woods! The purest stream, the most luxuriant and picturesque foliage I ever saw. But they do not need my admiration: Bird and Danby have lingered amongst those vallies, and they have immortalized them. As we descend the hill, however, we lose the distant prospect; and the near view, at first sight, offers nothing by way of compensation. If it were April, instead of November, we might gather plenty of primroses in

the willow-bed, on the right hand side. They grow amongst the gnarled and mossy roots there, by hundreds and thousands; and I observe it, because I scarcely ever gathered one in any part of the parish beside. Nay, I believe not one solitary straggler ever had the curiosity or the boldness to creep through the hedge to the other side. I cannot at all account for it: the soil appears just the same, and there is the same proportion of shade and sunshine, I should think; so this is one of the many things I wonder at. Earlier in the season we may make a very fair nosegay here of the May flower, and dog roses, and golden cups; the blue blossom of the profuse and balmy ground ivy; and that most lovely of all wild flowers the white major convolvulus, with its broad green leaves and spiry tendrils, and its blossom as pure as sunshine on white marble, that raises itself so loftily to the notice of the morning traveller,

and is folded and withered when he passes again at evening, as if it was created for the very purpose of whispering to the gale that passes us, "Man that is born of a woman so cometh up, and is so cut down." But now the last festoon of its wreathed leaves is sear and yellow, and the rest of the flowers have almost all left us; but there are some lingering hawk's eye daisies and autumn starwort; and there is the vervain, which the "Naturalist," in his interesting "Journal," tells us used to be sacred; and there is one, and only one blossom of that little bright, elegant flower, the cinque-foil, whose very name speaks to us of the heraldry of old times, and of its consequences in days that are gone; and yet it smiles there with perfect content, from its lowly bed of deep green moss, and truly, well it may; it never was emblazoned on a fairer field.

Now we will walk more slowly. We have past the low willow-bed, and are

beginning again to ascend the hill. Look across the fields—the ground is very irregular here, but you see that it slopes gradually upward, till at the top the hill is crowned by a group of low huts, which, humble as they are, yet rise above the stunted and shattered oaks and elms, by which they are surrounded. That place is called the Holms; perhaps because there are remains of many trees and hedges of *holm* or holly. At least this derivation may serve us until we can find a better. The trees which crest that little point of upland, are indeed, scarcely deserving the name, yet we will look with reverence on them; they are the last descendants of a noble race, for once

“ This was a forest, and a fayre forest ;
In it grew many a seemly tree.”

Yes; this was indeed one of the king's woods. A little further away, toward the North-east, you can discover the white

gable ends of an old house. It really looks very pretty, peeping through its grove of poplar and chesnut trees. The eminence on which it is built, commands an extensive view of the surrounding country. On that spot lived the keeper of the royal chase, and it is still called the Lodge. About half a mile to the left, king John is said to have built a hunting-seat, and this very place once echoed with the sound of the bugle-horn, and the cry of the staunch hounds, and the shout of the hunters. We cannot, certainly, look round us without feeling that the days of romance and chivalry are utterly past; yet, though one is long coming to the conclusion, and longer still before one chooses to own it, what is lost in romance is generally gained in comfort. To be sure, the country is said to be, from several causes, in a distressed and alarming state. I am no politician, but as an English Christian, "my fathers have declared to

me the noble works that our God has done for us in the days of old," and I believe he "will yet arise and deliver us for his honour." In the meantime, whilst I feel very sorry for the distresses of my countrymen in other counties, I am yet bound to be thankful that this parish, though very poor, is not particularly agitated by the commercial troubles of the times. It is not a manufacturing district; and as yet, those who are prudent and industrious have been enabled, generally speaking, to escape abject poverty.

There are some, however, the little history of whose days seems but one scene of loss and disappointment; and the lives of the poor old couple, of whom I spoke, are of the number. When they first married, Samuel undertook to supply an extensive factory with coal, and it became necessary for him to purchase a waggon and a team of horses. It was not pleasant, certainly, to go into debt to so large

an amount, at the first outset ; but he had no choice. It had been his father's business, and was the only one which he understood. The waggon cost more than £40, but the benevolent wheelwright agreed to receive the payment by instalments. The horses—you must not suppose them in very high condition—were paid for immediately, and scarcely paid for, when first one and then another became diseased and died. This was the beginning of troubles. In the meantime Hester met with an accident, which was the immediate occasion of an expensive and distressing illness,—and from the effects of which she never recovered. If my story were not fact, I should fear the charge of improbability in thus heaping misfortune on misfortune ; but mine is “*an over true tale.*” About this time, too, Samuel's sight, always weak, failed so fast that it became necessary for him to procure the assistance of a driver for his

waggon. Then his heart began to sink, as he has often told me, and the climax of his sentence at this point used always to be, "Then the third horse was dead, and the fourth was dying, and Hetty was bad too!"

But even these heavy and continued expenses might have been borne, but, suddenly, the concern for which he was engaged failed, throwing him, with many others, into a state of great distress. What was to be done? They were not genteel enough to think of the King's Bench. Their principle of honour—do not smile, my dear reader, at the idea of a collier's honour—and their standard of morality, were very high. They were *His* servants who has said, "Owe no man any thing;" and by his grace they kept his commandment. Every thing—it was but very little—that was not absolutely necessary, was sold; and their best clothes pledged; "for those," said Hester, "have no right to

wear good clothes who owe so much as we did then." There are some gay parties, in very high circles, I believe, that would cut rather a shabby figure if poor Hester's maxim were zealously enforced. Their clothes remained unredeemed for fifteen years. Their landlord took the waggon—then much the worse for the wear and tear of some years—as payment for rent; and Hester went round to the other creditors (the whole of whose demands together amounted nearly to £100) telling them simply the state of her affairs, and begging them to have patience until she could pay all. Her husband was now blind, but he could feel his way to and from town, with the produce of the little garden which Hester cultivated; and he managed to assist her in many ways, in the business in which she was particularly skilful, that of rearing calves, pigs, and rabbits. It was as a dealer in the last-mentioned pretty creatures, those favour-

ites of all children—to their misfortune, poor little things, it is that they are so—that I, then a child, became first acquainted with her. They have told me of losses and disappointments which would make my story too long: suffice it to say, that by constant exertion and strict self-denial, notwithstanding Samuel's blindness and Hester's frequent illness, their debts were all paid at the end of twenty-four years of hard labour, which had brought on premature old age.

During these twenty-four years of toil Hester had very great troubles of another sort. Of her seven sons not one survived the hour of his birth. How great a grief and how bitter a disappointment this was, year after year, a woman's weak pen cannot tell; but no woman needs to be told. "And now," said this childless mother to me, and she wept bitterly at this part of her story, "there's not one to carry home father, not one to carry home mother."

The great debt, as I said, was paid, but the years which it had taken to discharge it, had borne, as they flew, health and strength, and hope, away with them; and their daily bread was to be earned by the sweat of furrowed and aching brows, and the labour of enfeebled hands. But straightened as they have oftentimes been, for the mere necessities of life, they have always found "man's extremity God's opportunity:" to them the promise has been fulfilled, "Bread shall be given thee, and water shall be sure."

Their habits of industry and cleanliness prevent their only lower apartment from displaying that air of wretchedness which great poverty too often, but not necessarily assumes; and why should we wonder at it? "Godliness is profitable for all things." To be sure they are obliged to keep a curious assortment of articles—kettles and pans, an empty rabbit hutch, now used as a cupboard, and a barrel of

grain for the pig, all ranged along one side of their sitting-room : but the deal table is white and clean, and the few chairs almost bright ; and the cups and plates are arranged in seemly order along the shelf ; at one corner of which, carefully folded up, like a treasure of known value, lies their bible ; and whoever would read them a chapter from that blessed book, needed no other recommendation to make him a welcome visitor.

It was curious to observe in what different ways their sincere and humble attention used to be displayed. Hester's could express itself in many tears and earnest exclamations. But Samuel seldom spoke or moved from the moment when, as the reading began, he reverently laid aside his round collier's hat, until when, as it ended, he quietly resumed it with some expression of assent to what he had heard :—" Ah ! that's what we want." —" That's what I told Hetty." And

often when it has been a chapter of promise, I have heard him say, slowly, as if the experiences of long years were passing in review across his mind, to prove the truth of it, "Aye, the Lord will provide!" Such, indeed, was the last connected sentence I ever heard him utter. His present illness came on with sudden violence, and has already lasted many weeks; and Hester, bowed down by poverty and disease, and reduced by anxiety and toil to great weakness of body and mind, was crying bitterly at the idea that the parish must bury him. He made a strong effort to speak, and at last said, "She ought not to do so, the Lord *has* provided for me." And He *has* provided. Notwithstanding their poverty, I really believe the old man has wanted for nothing during his long illness, and Hester, throughout that time, has waited on him with the most unremitted attention, and the most sincere affection. I do not mean

to say that her neighbours are less friendly than most other poor neighbours; but they have their own troubles to think of; their own pressing necessities to provide for; and though they may have the inclination, they certainly have not found opportunity to give her much assistance. She has risen before day-light, and laboured hard all day, to keep things in decent order, and to provide her dying husband with every comfort which was possible; and she has watched alone with him through the long night. But nature cannot bear long what that poor old man has borne so patiently. It must be over soon. There! we are come in sight of the humble dwelling, which he has inhabited so long, but from which he will soon be borne forth to return no more.

We will not go any further, for the path here is very rough and miry. I cannot think how old Hester will manage to come up this steep lane at the funeral. She

will try, I know ; for the poor, I am happy to say, still think that friends and relations are those who ought to see the dear form that has been loved in life, laid at rest in its holy grave ; and certainly it must have been for the comfort of the sorrowing friends, and not for those hirelings who have nothing of mourners but the name, that the beautiful and most comfortable service of our church was composed. Poor old woman ! it will be a weary walk for her, to be sure, but then one, at least, of that faithful pair will, for the first time for many years, be no longer a subject of pity ; for “blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”

“The weather is altered very much since we were together last : it is no longer

mild autumn, but cold, and dark, and gloomy—altogether winter. The frost, a few nights since, entirely stripped the trees, and now we distinguish them not by the variety of foliage, but the varied character of the dark branches. And what beauty there is in those forms yet! How reverend and even noble the old chesnut looks, that almost hides the east window of the church; and with what perfect elegance that tall and fragile birch tree rises beside it! How gracefully all the leafless branches bow together, as the wind sweeps across them; and with what an air of joy they all rise again together when the gust is past! That elastic spring is indeed the only thing that wears any appearance of joy this evening. It is so cold that the lauristinus flowers keep themselves wrapt up, in their red foldings, showing no more intention of opening than they did a month ago. The

Michaelmas daisies were entirely withered, and they are cut down; and the few marygolds, small and single, and wet and pale, linger alone, along the littered border, and tremble at the cold evening gale, as if they dreaded another hail-storm; and indeed the heavy gray clouds, and the sighing of the wind, foretell a stormy night.

Hark! there is a sound fit for such an evening. The bell is tolling for a funeral. It is old Samuel's. That knell has a solemn, but not now a melancholy sound. Come through the gate, to the corner of the church, and we shall see the humble procession pass. Ah! the beautiful service is begun. I know the comforting words well, and the voice which utters them. How deep and musical it is!—"I shall see God! I shall see for myself! Mine eyes shall behold!" Yes, poor Samuel, there is no blindness in heaven.

The corpse is borne very slowly, yet the mourner who immediately follows, seems to have difficulty in keeping pace with them. It is poor Hester leaning on her crutches. How painfully she walks; how will she be able to reach home again? and how very desolate she will be when she does. But it will be a comfort to her as long as she lives, that she has performed this last duty—that she has looked into the deep grave, and said, “Good night! good night, Samuel!”—that she has laid him to rest with his fathers and his seven little sons; and, blessed be God, laid him there “in sure and certain hope.” But she will weep when she looks on his vacant chair; the place he occupied for four-and-forty years. She will feel his absence greatly, when she prepares her lonely meals; and she will miss the trembling voice that for so many years has breathed its prayer with her’s. And she

has not one dear child to console her—
not even a near relation ; she will be all
alone. Well, we must not forget her ; we
will go and comfort her to-morrow as
well as we are able. Poor old Hester !

Dec. 2, 1829.

CHRISTMAS-DAY, 1829.

“ ——— With thy leave I'll fetch thee flowers that grow
In thine own garden—Faith and Love, to thee :
With these I'll dress it up—and these shall be
My rosemary and bays.”—SIR MATTHEW HALE.

IT was a very clear, bright day indeed ; quite the beau idéal of a Christmas-day ; fresh and cold, but not unpleasantly so, as the wind was hushed. It scarcely waved the dark branches, and the clear purple shadows lay still in the unclouded sunshine, on the unspotted snow. It would have been very pleasant weather for walking, but there had been a thaw, and afterwards a hard frost, so that the pathway to the school was slippery : so our poor clerk found to his cost, for he met with a fall, and came to church looking

graver than usual, and his arm tied up in a red handkerchief, under his loose great coat. We are all sorry for him ; he is a civil, industrious young man, and he has a house-full of little children. It is well that children's frames are so constituted as not to mind tumbles ; certainly they do not, or we should not have assembled so many merry creatures as met both in the morning and afternoon of to-day. What a pretty sight our school-room was ! Such a circle of healthy looking country girls ! such a variety of gay colours and picturesque forms, in the way of clothes ! For this is one of our high days, when all who have any claim to belong to us, exhibit themselves in their best apparel ; and as it is cold, many are decked with shawls or silk handkerchiefs, borrowed from mothers and elder sisters ; and many have their black bonnets newly trimmed with gay ribbons, red, green, and yellow. And there was a happy look in almost every face,

that it did one's heart good to see. I say almost, for I am sorry to acknowledge that, even amidst our hardy country children, I have known some whose constitutions are unequal to the hardships with which they have to contend; I have seen young faces traced by care; cheeks that ought to have been bright, already faded by want; some poor little ones, to whom Christmas-day was not a *feast* day. Yet it was a happy day even to them. They are allowed, as a particular treat—any thing can be made a treat to simple country children—to go into the boys' school-room to sing; that twice in the year, at Christmas and Whitsuntide, we may have the pleasure of seeing all the children together; and many amusing glances pass between them, as the little shy girls come one after another through the widely-opened door, and range themselves, in decent order, up the west side of the long room, under the windows.

Then the hymns sung on Christmas-day are particular favourites. They know and understand them perfectly, both the words and the tunes; and they sing with all their voices, and as far as can be expected, with all their hearts. They sing as if they rejoiced certainly. And the room is decorated, according to old custom, with sprays of holly and evergreen, and so is the church; and I dare say it is part of the children's pleasure—I am sure it is part of mine—to see the varnished holly-boughs glittering in the sun, and the feathery yew and the dark ivy berries clustering from the sconces and round the pillars. I know there are good people who object to this “*dressing up*” on various grounds, and some prudent ones who think it a needless waste of shrubberies and plantations. But the children who cried Hosanna! did not begrudge the palm-boughs and branches of trees that were strewed in *his* way, the remem-

brance of whose blessed coming we to-day celebrate with deep gratitude and with fervent joy. O! I love customs hallowed by the use of our forefathers; and when that solemn creed which their wisdom has transmitted to us, was repeated to-day, there were hearts that responded not the less deeply, lips that replied none the less firmly, because it is the fashion of the present day to cavil at it, and because we are threatened that the men "who are given to change" may, before another year, expunge its form of sound words from our beautiful ritual. But we will not darken Christmas-day with gloomy forebodings. I said it was a day of joy. Of joy? Oh! yes, even in such a world of weeping as this, though remembrances that make the heart ache weigh down the mind even to-day.

But for us the holy and spotless table was spread which must in no wise be approached by complaining hearts: nay, if

it is possible, we must draw near cheerfully, as well as patiently; and our feelings must not belie our words when we bless God's "holy name for all his servants departed this life in his faith and fear."

I am no judge of music, but the singing at church, in the morning, seemed to me very sweet: and in the afternoon, when the Angel's Hymn, as it is called, was sung, the words seemed verified,—
"The glory shone around." The last sun-light of that bright day streamed in through the south windows, quite across the church, lighting up the boughs of fresh evergreens on its way, and reddening the white wall over little Mary's grave, and then reflected back on the marble figure of Hope, and the tablet against the chancel window, inscribed with the names of our member's family; and then the red gleam faded away, and the aisles became more and more shadowy, and the outlines of the pillars were less

and less clearly defined, until by the time the service was over, the uncertain daylight had quite given way to the glimmer of the few sconces which were placed at the top of the middle aisle and on the altar rails. No very splendid illumination; yet sufficiently bright to gladden the eyes and hearts of the long and varied procession that presently came up towards it. Look, the children are leaving their seats in the gallery, and are coming up the aisle two and two. At first, as they came down the dark steps, there was a little shuffling and pushing for pre-eminence, but now as they come into the light they appear more orderly. Here they come! a joyous train, and what a variety of faces, and dresses, and sizes: first the tall school-girls, looking almost as much ashamed as they are pleased. They have just arrived at the age when the outward appearance of children outstrips the improvement in manners and

understanding ; a most awkward and unprepossessing age ; and then, seeing that they grow tall, they unfortunately take it for granted that they grow wise also ; and just when they most need instruction, leave school. Ignorant as we know these girls to be, we scarcely hope they will condescend to stay with us another year. Yet there are exceptions. Here is one ; little grave Betty, with a plain pale face and a tidy nankeen gown : a present, I rather think, for there is something genteel in the cut, though the colour is faded, and her handkerchief is tidily crossed and tied behind. She has a great love of learning ; gets by heart all the hymns in all the hymn-books she can meet with, and always when she has said her appointed lessons, comes up shyly, with a countrified curtsy and a modest request, " Please to hear me say my Psalm, ma'am ? " She is what our quondam mistress used to call "*a quiet girl.*" It was the chief praise she ever

bestowed; and indeed considering little Betty's unfortunate sex, there are those, I know, who would only say,

“Wondrous strange, if it be true!”

Never mind, she is a very nice child at any rate: she is always first in her place, and if her teacher has been ill or absent, there is, when she comes again, a sparkle in the grey eyes and a colour in her white cheek, that makes little plain Betty look almost pretty. But I have said quite enough about her. She has past the huge basket at the corner of the aisle; has received her cake, and has followed the others into the vestry, and, I suppose, into the snowy church-yard. O no! look, they are gathered in a group round the blazing fire, which throws its quivering and sparkling blaze on the pictures of the Oxford Almanack, and the sprays of laurel and yew with which they are decorated, and brightens the soft folds of the fair

white linen surplice which has been thrown across one of the chairs. "Go on, children; make haste home before it grows darker, and slippery as it is, take care that you neither fall down nor fall out by the way." But here comes a petitioner, and I observe that when our children are disposed to be very polite, they will not ask a favour for themselves, but speak for each other—"If you please, ma'am, Ann Miles says, may she wait for her brother?" "O yes, brothers are worth waiting for."

And here come the boys; another long and motley procession, not quite so gay-looking as the young ladies, but displaying enough of variety, both of form and colouring to employ a far abler pen in the description than mine. Here are some with clean pinbefores and nicely plaited frills: these have tidy mothers, I am sure: and some with well-fitted velveteen jacket and trowsers, evidently new for the occa-

sion: and some who look very different; whose wild air and dress, unmended clothes, to hide which, to-day, is pulled on the father's waistcoat, perhaps of scarlet or spotted plush, and buttons that look like fire-stones; none of it old, yet none in good condition, all telling more of bad management than of poverty. And yet the wildest and most uncouth among them, looks up to-night with a pleasant smile and a well-intentioned, though not very graceful bow, and seems, at present at least, disposed to behave himself "lowly and reverently to all his betters;" and indeed I trust they are disposed to do their duty by him. How long the good feeling may last it is not for us to know; we will take care that it does not fail on our side. The word of life is put into their hands, and though many of them have the worst examples at home, we will remember who has said, "Blessed are they that sow beside *all* waters."

Here come the very little ones: the sexton's three fair grand-children, with blue eyes and curly flaxen hair. They always look very neat. I think there must be good management at home, for there is another baby there, and the father's wages are only eleven shillings a week. Now they are all served; all the children at any rate. But there appears to me a consultation of graver persons gathered round the great basket. I understand what it is. The cakes that are left are always divided amongst those who are so lucky as to be on the spot—clerk, sexton, singers, schoolmaster and mistress. There is a scarcity I find; this year they will have short commons, I am afraid: yet they all looked cheerful and contented; and so the congregation separated, and the lights were put out, and the church doors shut, and we all went home. Then came the long quiet evening, when some of us gathered, as closely as possible,

round the bright fire, and listened whilst one and another dear voice read some passage from *Keble's Christian Year*. Soothing, beautiful poetry! well calculated to lift the heart above the cares of this troublesome world, and to light the path with the sunshine of heaven. And then came the holy hour of evening prayer, and we all assembled. Not all who had ever assembled there, certainly, but if there was cause for sorrow, there was more for joy and gratitude; for those who met there loved each other well, and there was good hope to meet again those who were parted: there we listened to the word of our hope, and the promise of our salvation, and we joined in prayer to Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present even us mourners before his presence with exceeding joy; and we lay down to rest with humble and thankful hearts, and our pleasant Christmas-day was ended.



THE GRAVES OF INFANTS.

“ Unhappy losse ; nay happy gain be 't saide
When by earth's losse, heaven's kingdom's purchased—
Christ's blood the price, God's word the evidence,
Heaven settles crowns on children's innocence—
The branch so soon cropt off, earth cast thereon
Adds turf to twig, and gains possession.
Thy title's good ; thy tenure's *capite* ;
Death past the fine, Christ the recoverie.”

“ **IT** is no small advantage,” says old Jeremy Taylor, “ that our children, dying young, receive : for their condition of a blessed immortality is rendered to them secure, by being snatched from the dangers of an evil choice, and carried to their little cells of felicity, where they can weep no more.”——“ They,” he continues, “ are entered into a secure possession, to which they went with no other

condition but that they passed into it through the way of mortality, and for a few months wore an uneasy garment." Thus far I read, and then I stopt, and the recollection of some whom I had known thus carried to "their little cells of felicity," recurred to my mind, and it struck me that a relation of some of these real remembrances might interest you, my kind reader. I was standing at my own little room window, and the weather was clear and mild, much such a day, I thought, (only then it was somewhat later in the year) that, now, a long while ago, I went to pay a visit to our clerk's wife and her new born twins. I had never seen twins; and I remember feeling much delighted—more so, I suppose, than the poor relations could be—when I heard that two had been added to the already large family.

As I went along I could think of nothing but the little brother and sister. I

believe they appeared to my mind's eye far more lovely and interesting than any other children could possibly be ; and when I saw them wrapped in their long white robes, and lying side by side in the neat cradle, I dare say I much amused the grave nurse by the extravagance of my admiration ; and, on my part, I remember being much shocked by her calm avowal, " that though poor Mary might not wish to part with either, now they were come, to be sure she would sooner have had one at a time, if it had pleased God." " Sooner have had one at a time," I said, " what, when they look so beautiful, lying there together !" It was early spring, and when I left the house—(they lived then at an old-fashioned cottage at the bottom of a sloping garden, on the right hand side of the upper road)—some one gave me two or three half opened snow-drops. They were the first I had seen that year ; and on my way home, my mind being full of the

twin children, as I looked at the fair buds some common-place resemblances naturally enough presented themselves to me. They are as pure, I thought; come into as stormy a world; growing day by day more lovely; and I forget whether then I added, perhaps as soon to wither. But I am sure I did not always dwell on the last point of similarity, for when I visited them afterwards—and I did visit them very often—perhaps sometimes when the poor mother, delicate in her health, and fully occupied with the cares of a large family, could have dispensed with my company—I used to meditate, in a very romantic way, on the delights they would have in growing up together. I thought they would never be separated. I tried to believe that this little brother and sister would never wish for any other love than the pure and holy one of which I supposed nature must have implanted in their minds a double share. I fancied the sis-

ter, as she grew up, watching her brother's wishes, with woman's quickest perception, and most earnest desire to please, and the brother ever at her side, her protector, and guardian, and friend; and I usually ended by wishing I had a twin brother. Was I very silly, my patient reader? Did you ever hear of a romantic young lady being otherwise?

One day, when they were about six weeks old, I was much displeased at finding only one lying in the cradle. The other, the mother said, was asleep up stairs. They disturbed each other, she said, and she had so much work to do that she was glad to let them sleep as long as she could. But her reasoning did not at all satisfy me. I thought it such a great pity to part them: they never looked so pretty as when they were together. I need not have troubled myself, they were not to be separated long. It was when the snowdrops came that I looked first on

the little delicate creatures: the snow-drops faded, but the white roses and lilies of the valley, opened just in time to strew in the short wide coffin : death, that stern divider of most fellowships, seemed as eager as myself that here there should be no separation. I forget which died first, but the other little one lay quiet until then, and then perhaps hearing its fellow angel call—

“ For they say, that little infants reply by smiles
and signs,

“ To the band of guardian angels that round about
them shines.”

—it struggled with the bands of mortality, rejoined its beloved companion, and they flew to heaven together. I saw them once more sleeping; but it was the sleep from which the mother's kiss may not awaken. The disorder which had carried them off having lasted only a few hours, had not in the least marred their beauty. They were still delicately formed

and fair children. The eyes were closed, so as to show to advantage the long soft eye-lashes, and the little dimpled hands were as beautifully rounded as a sculptor would desire to represent them in his pure marble; but they were as motionless as the marble, and as cold. I looked upon them no more, but I remember standing at the garden-gate, and listening to the voice which told that "Almighty God, of his great mercy, had taken to himself the souls of our dear brother and sister." They rest together under the chesnut-tree, close to our garden-hedge, and though at the time I was very sorry to lose such pretty play-things, I have long ceased to regret them. When I see how very much evil there is in the world; how much "sin to blight," and how much "sorrow to fade," can I grieve that so many frail buds are transplanted, by the Lord of the garden, to a fairer climate? O no! Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come

unto me," and I do believe he said it not only in reference to the group of young Israelites then gathered round him, nor *merely* as an encouragement to Christian parents to trust their living treasures to his care, but that his omniscient eye looked round, at that moment, on the innumerable multitude of those little ones, whom his free grace has, in all ages, called to glory.

Such thoughts always arise in my mind with a feeling of something like joy, as I watch the procession of an infant's funeral. A mother, indeed, cannot at the time comfort herself with these considerations. Rachel will weep for her children. Even when there have been several children, I have seen the remembrance of the lost little one cast a gloom over the mother's brow that the health and mirth of the rest have failed to dispel. So it was with her who has laid her darling close to our altar's rails. You cannot fail to find the

grave, for it is marked by a white marble stone, bearing the name, and age, and date of the child's death. The parents came here strangers, and when they left the place, which they did soon after little Mary's funeral, there was not one relation whom the record could interest. But the mother's fancy, doubtless, often hovers round the holy spot, and she feels comforted at the thought,—“the grave cannot be lost, that simple epitaph must preserve it; it cannot be violated, for it is under the shadow of the chancel.” She was buried, I well remember, on her birth-day; the day on which, twelve months before, her parents had welcomed their eldest daughter. It was on the first of April, and a very stormy day. The wind drove along before it dark masses of hail clouds, tore off and swept across the church-yard the half-opened leaves of the chesnut-trees, and shook down whole sprays of bud and blossom from the early fruit-

trees. Ah! what apt emblems every spring brings with it! But little Mary's mother, though whilst she remained here, she never recovered her spirits, and though the large dark eyes were, during the few times I afterwards saw her, always filled with tears, I trust has since regained her cheerfulness. She had no daughter, but she had two fair and healthy little sons; so she ought to have thought herself a happy mother.

But have you ever observed a grave under the south wall of the church. The briar bush, which is cut down every year, and every year springs up so vigorously, grows close to the foot of it. There is no stone, but the poor lady, who has sometimes come from a distance to our church, knows well who sleeps there. I have seen her, when all the congregation was dispersed, and she thought herself unobserved, go round to the grave, and kneeling by it, hide her face, while the

whole slight frame shook with the violence of her emotion. Then she would rise up and go away, and then come back and weep again, and stoop down and gather two or three violets or daisies, or if there was nothing else, some blades of the long grass that grew on the grave. Ah ! that poor lady knew well who slept there : it was her son ; her only son, whom she loved. I have heard that she was not happy in her married state, and perhaps she had hoped that the birth of this child might be the beginning of better days for her. Perhaps she had been long childless. Perhaps she had set her heart on this fair gourd, and trusted in its increasing shadow to be her shelter ; having forgotten that all flesh is grass, and the grass withereth. Perhaps she made an "idol," and found it "clay." I cannot tell ; but he was not, and she refused to be comforted.

I am afraid you must be tired, but one story more and I have done ; and then we

will seek for a livelier scene. The wife of the Missionary who came home last spring, brought with her, from the far country where she had been long a sojourner, three noble boys. But they were not *all* her children. Her youngest was not with her. Did he sleep, then, under the stately mimosa, or the beautiful palm-tree, beneath the shadow of the church raised to the name of the Christian's God, in the land of idols? Then, perhaps, his swarthy nurse sits on his grave, and tells how the gentle white lady devoted her child to her Saviour in baptism, and found comfort when he died, and how she, poor heathen as she had been, had learnt submission from the Christian's submission, and wisdom from the Christian's book, and now having faith in Christ, lived in the calm hope of meeting again those her kind instructors, and that her foster son. No! the Missionary's child is not buried there: he died on the voyage home: he

was buried in the deep sea : so neither nurse nor mother may look upon his grave ; but his little coffin was made as neatly as circumstances permitted, and the ceremony of his funeral was conducted with all that attention to order and propriety which it is the last comfort of survivors to pay. All the children, and there were many on board beside his own little brothers, went on deck and stood round the corpse whilst the beautiful service was read ; and it was solemnly and affectingly read, by the beloved friend and fellow labourer who had been a stranger with them in the strange land. It was sad to be obliged to take the *last* look at the dear child even before “ the first day of death was fled.” There was something inexpressibly melancholy in the plunge with which the lost treasure sunk down, deeper and deeper, to the depths which no line has sounded ; and the waves rolled on, and the gallant ship hastened on her

course, so that the eye of man might never again know the place of his rest. But Thou, Lord, art the hope of them that remain in the broad sea! So thought his mother whilst she wept in silence; but she looked for the resurrection of the body, (when the sea shall give up her dead) and she was calm.

I have always thought that of the many troubles which woman's heart feels, the loss of infant children, deep as it must be, is the one which most readily yields to the comforts of religion, and the expressions of many mothers with whom I have conversed, have confirmed me in my opinion. "I did all that lay in my power to do for him," said my favourite Millicent to me, "I should ill deserve to be called mother if I had not, but now he is better provided for. "Mine was a sweet tempered child," said another, "but none too good for Him who has taken it." "Little dear!" said poor Amy, when last year

she buried her youngest of thirteen, "he was as fair a baby as ever the sun shone upon." She wept much, for she was one of those in whose hearts extreme poverty and distress fails to deaden either the warmest or gentlest feelings of woman's nature. "Mine was as fair a baby as ever the sun shone upon, but none too fair for the place he is gone to !" But I have said enough on the subject in prose, I think, so I will finish my chapter with some verses which occurred to me when I was thinking of little Mary's grave.

Ours is a garden green and fair,
And bright with flowers in June,
And spicy shrubs waft odours there
To the high harvest moon ;
But in spring hours we scarce know why,
Our snow-drops only come and die.
The chesnut's solemn boughs disclose
Their thousand blossoms well,
And hither comes luxuriant rose
Her tale of love to tell ;
The snow-drops tremble, and are gone
From the chill world they glanced upon.

And she was like a bud that died,
Forgot by all but me,—
But often at our altar's side,
When her low grave I see,
I think how those first flowers of spring
Faded in their earliest blossoming.

She sleeps not in her father's tomb,
Nor when their days are past,
To rest them in this shadow'd gloom
Shall kindred come at last.
Beneath this little marble stone
One infant corpse must rest alone.

O blessed lot ! ere guilt and care
That smile of innocence belie,
To hide in mother's arms—and there
Where one has lived—to die.
No dust defiles spring's first born flower,
No blight is in the snow-drop's bower.

Yet more—'tis to the infant dead
The blessed word is given ;
“ Their angels live !” the Saviour said,
“ Round the bright throne in heaven !”
No storm those stainless flowers shall tear,
The snow-drops never wither there !

JANUARY 23, 1830.

MARY, THE SAILOR'S WIDOW.

And what her learning ? 'Tis with awe to look
In every verse throughout one sacred book,
From this her joy, her hope, her peace is sought ;
This she has learn'd—and she is nobly taught.

CRABBE.

IT is just the weather when country people, that is, people like some I have known, who really love the country, and are determined that every body else shall think so, make a point of taking a walk. To be sure it is very dirty under foot, and very gloomy over head, and a cold rain drop, that has not determined whether or not to become an icicle, hangs from every spray ; but there is a feeling of independence with which a thoroughly-bred coun-

try woman sets out for a walk in such weather, that she would do ill to exchange for the ease of a luxurious ride ; and a degree of pleasure when she considers the exact suitability of her dress to the place and season, which more delicate and costly array does not always afford. The bright, broad pattern plaid, real double Scotch and nearly as thick and heavy as a carpet, is an old friend, has been wet many times, but never wet through, has kept out many hail-storms, and will probably keep out many more ; and the snug cottage bonnet,—rather coarse plat, I should guess it was home manufacture—is of far too decorous a shape to think of flying away with the wind, should it blow ever so hard : then the pattens, which, after all, are necessary evils, add a little to one's stature, so that through the degree of self-approval felt, on making a successful effort to leave the fire-side in such weather, the amplitude given to the figure by

the capacious foldings of the cloak, and the increased height, this is just the time to feel a person of consequence. And yet the consequence is materially increased by the comfortable contents of the little covered basket. Ah! we are only the bearers of another's bounty. I can guess who has filled it so kindly, and I know who it is for—poor Mary, the Sailor's widow.

If we go the field-way we shall meet with few interruptions; and we will look as we pass the side of the church-yard hedge, perhaps we shall find some of those very fragrant and singular flowers, the scented coltsfoot. Yes; there is one half hidden by its broad rough leaf: it is not a wild plant: we set it in the garden border, on the shady side; but though a winter flower, the little thing did not understand why it was to be deprived of the degree of sunshine, winter could afford, so it broke through all hindrances, forced

its tough and knotted fibres through the heavy clods of clay, shot up its broad leaves on the graves, and amongst the nettles and thorns ; and in the first gleam of a December sun, lifted up its pale and fragrant blossoms, smiling for joy at having accomplished its purpose. And, really, the little flower was right. I have learnt, lately, that in so stormy a world as this, sunshine is a thing worth seeking, and to be yet more serious, we should all be wiser if, like that little flower, we sought happiness in—what ought to be the human soul's sunshine—the light of God's countenance, though it shine amid the thorns and nettles of affliction ; aye, and on the very borders of the grave. I am happy to say I know many who understand the secret, and poor Mary is one of them. She has had great troubles, but the Psalmist's God “ delivereth out of all.” When quite young she lost her mother, and Oh ! how much is told in that little sentence !

How many kindnesses unperformed ! sorrows unsoothed ! hours of sickness unattended ! Her father married again, and she, a child of seven years old, was sent to a farm-house, to nurse an infant, and to wait upon two or three children younger than herself. Being naturally of a tender and affectionate disposition, she felt her situation more than some older children might have done ; and she has told me that she used sometimes to steal away from her little charge, and sitting down under the hedge, hide her face in her pinafore, and cry for her mother ; and the sound of the tolling bell would generally awaken a passionate expression of grief, and a wish that it was tolling for her, that she might see her mother. But if the sorrows of children are as hard to bear as the troubles of maturer years, they certainly do not last so long, and He who when, father and mother forsake, taketh up, raised up for

poor Mary, in her next place of service, a kind and watchful friend. Those times were not called so 'liberal' as the present, whether these are wiser and better remains to be proved; and Mary's old-fashioned mistress, besides teaching her the Catechism, and hearing her daily read the Bible, expected her to attend, twice on every Sunday, the ordinances of the church, by God's mercy established in her native land. She did attend—long, perhaps because it was a duty to obey her mistress; afterwards, possibly, because it was a decent and respectable habit; but it has been my lot to know, in more than one instance, that the God of order is often pleased to bless an orderly and regular attendance on the outward means with his inward and spiritual grace. (I wish every one thought so, the church-path between this avenue of trees would be better trodden.) So it was in her case. She was preserved from the many

evils to which she was exposed after the death of her excellent mistress, and providentially provided for, day by day, when ill health compelled her to leave her place, and she applied diligently to learn the trade of a glove maker. She took lodgings with a respectable young woman, whose husband was at sea; and on his return he brought home with him his brother-in-law, Mary's future husband. I do not wonder the young sailor liked her, so very neat in her person, so civil and industrious, and so pretty as I am sure she must have been then.

Perhaps you can fancy, better than I can tell you, all that happened next; how happy they were together; what pleasant walks they took in each other's company, at twilight on summer evenings; how poor Mary wept at parting, and lay awake listening to the high wind on long stormy nights; and when he came home, how he used to bring her curious things from

beyond sea—beautifully polished shells, such as our English fish never heard of; ears of Indian corn; and little pictures of the “*Madonna*,” cut curiously at the nunneries; and cocoa nuts, and a coloured basket from Portugal, and all sorts of things from all quarters of the world; for he made many voyages, both before and after their marriage; and you can fancy that the gifts he brought were very precious, and some of them we may still see hanging in different parts of her neat house, and carefully treasured there; for the hand that gave them is in the grave.

It will be well to walk a little faster. It needs some philosophy to own, that, in weather like this, it is a duty and may be a pleasure to walk at all, for the wind is piercing on the brow of this billy field, yet the mist hangs so sullenly on the river, and over the beautiful fields beyond, that we cannot enjoy the fair prospect. The lanes into which we next enter are

more sheltered, and if we were disposed to loiter, we might even now find wonders enough, and beauties enough, for a long day's consideration, in the leafless hedges and the withered banks. For in the hollows lie masses of snow, that came from the region of heaven, to show us the brightness of those garments which are white "as no fuller on earth can white them;" which comes we know not whence, and will return we cannot tell how; and where it has melted it discovers to us long, shining wreaths of ivy, and beneath the dark leaves the soft green moss, of which nature weaves her velvet inner robe at this cold season, and in which she wraps up her delicate children, young buds, and seeds, and sprouting roots; and of which she forms secret and warm hiding places, for innumerable glittering insects, through their quiet winter sleep. I like to look at moss, for it reminds me of poor Mungo Parke, and the

comfort he once derived from the thought that the God who had made so beautiful, and so tenderly guarded *this*, one of his meanest creatures, would not surely be unmindful of him.

But if I do not go on with my story, I shall get to Mary's house, before I have told you all. She married, but a sailor's wife, I always think, must have a double share of sad partings and feverish anxieties. Poor Mary at least found it so. Her husband was long in a French prison, saw dangerous service at the taking of Gibraltar, and was at the siege of Genoa. During many years she had few months of his company, and once he was absent from her for more than three years. All this time she diligently followed her business, living with her sister-in-law. They were fellow sufferers, for their husbands served on board the same ship; so having like hopes and fears, they were well suited to each other's society; and

Mary looks back, with evident pleasure, to the remembrance of those quiet months, and speaks with satisfaction, of the regard which was always maintained between herself and her sister, by a scrupulous attention to the discharge of every day duties, and by paying that degree of respect, (which is too often neglected amongst near relations even in more polished society) but which, after all, is perhaps the surest way of securing esteem, and consequently of maintaining real friendship.

But the years past on, and his country was willing that her weather-beaten servant should rest at last. Samuel came home from the last voyage, and receiving his well-earned pension, brought his wife from the county where she had all her life resided, to our parish, which was his native place. She was our next door neighbour for years, but I was a child then, and knew nothing about her but

her name. Her husband's pension amounted to sixteen pounds a year, and she was still able to increase the little income by her business, but the greatest earthly blessing, health, was lost to them both for ever. The small house in which they lived is pleasantly situated, and was, I am sure,—for she is one of the neatest women I ever knew—kept in beautiful order. Her husband had no temptation certainly, and I believe never did seek for any recreation but what his own little garden afforded. I never remember meeting them in our walks, but I can recollect when the rulers of our school-room were absent, clambering into the window-seat, and standing on tip-toe, to watch Mr. and Mrs. North, (for they were dignified by their title then, or at least we called them so, being brought up according to the old “regime,” and taught to respect our elders) so we used to scramble into the window-seat, as I said before, standing on tip-toe,

and stretching head above head, to watch them set out for church. I see them now, in my mind's eye ; she in her neat sage-coloured pelisse and straw bonnet, and he in his comfortable great coat and sailor's trowsers, and black silk handkerchief ; but they used to walk feebly and slowly ; neither had an arm strong enough to support the other, so each leaned on a walking stick ; his constitution was rapidly giving way under the hardships which he had undergone ; and she, though scarcely past the meridian of life, was evidently sinking under the influence of some unseen but incurable malady. At that time, indeed, comfortable as they were to outward appearance, she had to undergo more than any one knew, except as she sometimes says with tears, her heavenly Father and herself. And she has told me how, for days together, she has watched alone with her husband, when he was unable by any means, to obtain one hour's

respite from agonizing pain ; how she has risen to wait upon him, night after night, and many times in the night, and month after month ; and how, when she had taken pains to prepare nicely their comfortable meal, it was laid aside untasted, because he was too ill, and she too sad, to feel any disposition for it.

Alas ! is not this the *real* version of many a story which tells of the happiness of the sailor's or soldier's rest, in his proud native land, when his toil is done ? Oh ! happy they who expect repose only in that country where " there is no more sea," and where they " learn war no more ! " It was no wonder the anxious wife became weak ; no wonder that her weakness increased, so that her hands refusing their accustomed task, her business was laid aside. Then her husband died suddenly, and she ceased to receive his pension ; and I have heard her tell, how, on the day of his death, their wedding-day seventeen years

before, she found herself a widow with one shilling, and only one; and the expenses of the funeral to be paid. But her landlord is a very clever man in his way, bustling and managing; he bid her "take heart," he would provide for the funeral; so he took possession of her husband's wardrobe, which was much better than that of most poor men, and disposing of the different articles amongst his work-people, without losing a shilling himself, or giving his poor tenant one, he certainly lightened her mind of a heavy burthen. But if one was taken away, many must have been left, and it must have been with a very sad heart that the poor widow applied for the small pittance which yet was all that a parish, overburthened with poor, could be expected to supply; it must have been very reluctantly that she, who had been so long mistress of her neat house, left it to seek lodgings; and she was tempted, perhaps, to doubt the care of her

heavenly Father, when she considered that, just when she needed most, her increasing illness entirely put it out of her power to make the smallest exertion on her own behalf. In a short time she went to the Infirmary, and though in patience and humility she submitted to the various trying remedies which it was thought needful to apply, she was, at the end of thirty-six long weeks, sent out as incurable. Incurable, indeed, as to the suffering body, but to the troubled soul the pious labours of one who at that time ministered there in holy things had been abundantly blessed. It would ill become me to praise him. I have known others beside Mary who have blessed his simple and earnest manner of preaching the truth as it is in Jesus ; who have experienced his unwearyed attention and his laborious exertion, but his record is on high.

Mary returned, patient and cheerful, to her former lodgings, and then our ac-

quaintance with her commenced. She endeavoured, but in vain, to sit up, as she had been accustomed to do ; so she took to her bed, and set about discovering the most useful ways of employing herself. She found that she could do a little needle-work sometimes, and the kind widow with whom she lodged agreed to receive this very small requital as payment for her washing. Is there not something beautiful in observing how our God provides for all those little wants of his people which we, in our pride, think too mean to mention ? Ah ! our Lord did not say in vain, " Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." When she was tired of work she could read, and though her Bible and Olney Hymns of themselves occupy most of her time, yet she has many kind neighbours, who lend her various books and tracts, all good in their way, and she likes them all. I speak in the present time, for her employments

are much the same as they were ; but her hostess, the widow, married, and Mary thinking wisely that brides and bridegrooms are the fittest company for each other, settled herself anew with a very old woman, as clean in her house and person as possible, but altogether deaf, and not altogether good tempered. She was pleased to see her kitchen adorned with Mary's neat furniture, and she certainly liked so respectable a lodger, though she sometimes grumbled a little at the unavoidable trouble she gave ; and notwithstanding all her infirmities, she was certainly a very suitable guardian for our poor cripple ; a degree of affection subsisted between them ; and it was with real concern that we saw the old woman confined to her bed, by what appeared a last illness, and Mary necessarily obliged to seek a home elsewhere. For moving, although our little cart, our lively horse, and our grave man, were always put in

requisition, and I am sure ought to have felt honoured in the service, yet cost her some shillings, which she little knew how to afford; and beside, when she and old Sarah parted, she could not find one person who would receive her, helpless as she was, at the very low sum she had been accustomed to pay. "How I shall give more," she said to me, "I cannot tell, but my Lord can tell. Or how I shall find bread to eat (and her lip quivered, and the colour rose on her cheek, and the tear in her bright eyes) how I shall find bread to eat, I do not know, but the Lord knows."

My fancied companion, whoever you may be, feel as poor Mary felt, and I have not told my story in vain. Well, her next removal saw her settled much nearer the church, with a very grave and demure matron, of (as we might read in an old book) a very serious, but not a very sweet aspect. Her handkerchief was

always exactly pinned, and I should think she never wore a soiled cap or apron in her life. She had many good points, I dare say, but I never could like her. I was always afraid of offending her, and never in my life met with any one to whom it seemed so difficult to do a kindness. She certainly must have the organ for misunderstanding, if there is such an organ, and if there be any truth in craniology. It would not do long, and we bore all the blame of Mary's giving notice to quit; but indeed we had nothing at all to do with it, except as much as we could, forwarding her removal when it came to the point.

She settled in the Marsh again; sometimes was kindly, and sometimes unkindly treated, and once was left for many days in the house by herself, with half-a-crown's rent to pay out of the three shillings which formed her whole week's income. But when she most wanted a friend, some good

neighbour was always sure to come in, and her landlord kindly refused to take the money, which she scrupulously sent. In all her different habitations we have been her constant visitors, and certainly if we have at any times taken pains to serve her, if we have sometimes been exposed to rough weather or unpleasant walks, we have been repaid threefold by her gratitude and her affection. But here we come to one of my country stiles, the last we shall have, luckily, and as it is a specimen of its peculiar kind, we will stop to examine it. No doubt there was here, once, a tolerably passable stile, with straight posts and even bars, as a stile in a civilized country might be expected to have. But some of my compatriots having, I suppose, good reasons of their own, generally demolish every thing that looks like a legitimate boundary. I have heard a story, and that from the very best authority, of a farmer—churchwarden he was

in his time, who planted a good hedge one day, rose up to visit it the next morning, and it was gone—the whole hedge gone on the first night. That was twenty years ago : I believe they are much improved since then ; still, however, some people call them a lawless set, and hint that they still would thus gladly make “ right of common,” to turn in their own half-starved quadrupeds to forage in their neighbours’ ground : others say that a barge comes down the river at evening, and lying under the shelter of the hill, is ready to receive and carry away, before morning, any thing and every thing that can be smuggled into it—chicken, or knives, or posts, or hay, or stiles, or the great copper boiler. But I do not wish to be suspicious : I would gladly think my poor countrymen “ all honourable men.” Their antipathy to new gates is certainly an awkward and provoking particular, but the ruder barriers which usu-

ally supply their places, are almost always more fit for drawing ; so perhaps it may be from a love of the picturesque.

Am I trifling when I should be serious ? Believe me, I do from my heart wish them "to know the way of truth, which they have not known ;" and that "the fear of God might be before their eyes." But I do not believe, considering the population, there are a larger proportion of the worst characters here than elsewhere ; and those who are most willing to give our Forest a bad name, have not the opportunities I have, of knowing how little it deserves it. But however this may be, the difficult stile is to be past notwithstanding ; under and on either side, the ground is much more muddy than any thing we have met with yet, in our muddy walk : so we cannot creep through, and the bars being made of two rough and knotted branches, the lowest somewhat more than two feet and a half from the ground, and the one bending out, and the

other as awkwardly bending in ; and many twigs and pieces of bark threatening, or that would make good the threat, to tear ladies' delicate clothes, if we had such on. All these circumstances make it doubtful how we shall get over ; but we are used to these things ; our stern, grave collier, with his candle in his hat, and his full sack of coal on his shoulder, strides across without condescending to notice that it is an impediment : and the upright market-woman, as she gets over, does not lift a hand to the heavily-laden basket, which she poises so steadily on her head : and for ourselves, though our little package requires care ; we have only to lean down, and put that in safety first, and then—practice makes perfect—one hand on the rough bough, and a spring, and we are over, pattens and all. And now we are here in the lane ; the most melancholy looking lane in the parish, I was going to say ; but that word will not do ; there is something in that word interesting and

"gentlemanlike;" so I am sure it cannot be melancholy, but it is in the superlative degree ugly and gloomy.

The mud, which is the colour of coal-dust, is almost impassable, except that the deep ruts have been in various places filled with flinty black dross, from the smoky lead works below; the ditches are wide, and full of dark-coloured snow, which in some places discovers the yet darker and frozen surface of the stagnant water beneath; the ill-made banks have in many places given way, so that the low briar hedges are shattered and uneven.

But we are almost at our journey's end, that is Mary's house, the lowest and nearest to us: there is nothing shattered or uncomfortable there, for her kind landlord has had it neatly repaired for her, and she is mistress of it herself, paying eighteen-pence a week for rent; and old Sarah, wonderful to tell, is quite recovered, and has come to live with her, and take care of her; and for the present, at

least, they are both happier than they have been for a long time; and we will delight old deaf Sarah, by making signs and notes of admiration, at the beautiful cleanliness and order of the little establishment, by pointing at the white wall, and gazing at the long rows of various crockery ware, for I have given up the attempt to make her hear, as a thing quite out of the question; and we shall see Mary's ears of Indian corn, and her curious Portuguese basket, and her bed-side carpet, wrought, she says, to represent the English colours above the French ones. And she will be well pleased to see us; and if we can learn gratitude from her thankfulness, and cheerfulness from her content, we shall have cause to be pleased also, that we left the fire-side, on this cheerless February day, and came through cold and mud to visit the sailor's widow.

February, 3, 1830.

THE LAST OF THE FAMILY.

“ Thus they rest”

“ They that with smiles lit up the hall,
And cheer'd with joy the hearth,—

Alas! for love, if *thou* wert all,
And nought beyond—Oh earth!—Mrs. HEMANS.

“ **T**HE last of the family!” I said to myself, repeating the words with which our clerk had just answered my question as to who was going to be buried? “The last of the family! the last of the name!” and then, perhaps, my thoughts might have wandered to very old tombs, with their illegible inscriptions; and to the statues of knights, with the emblems of their holy warfare; and so, to the reclin-

ing figures, with the ruffs and peaked beards of the days of the cavaliers; and on to stately monuments of my lord and lady, in the full court dress of the time of George the First; and last, to the plain but massy marble tablet, with the Grecian ornaments of the present day; and I might have fancied the filling up of the vacant space, that told how the last of a mighty race had come to his kindred dead and his long home; and the raising of the last escutcheon, with its death's-head crest, used only, say the old books of heraldry, to show that death has conquered all, into its gloomy abiding place. I might perhaps, but there was no deeper shadow than that of the green chesnut, over the open grave by which I stood; and I well knew that our church-yard was not a place wherein to nurse the recollections of centuries gone by, because seventy years ago there was no church there. Seventy years ago, and where was

this chesnut-tree? A slender sapling it must have been then, when the weight of the wood pigeon could sway it to the very root; and I can remember the old man who planted it. He was father to him who is to be buried to-night, and a very great favourite the old man was with us children, when we followed him about, as he was doing his easy day's work in our garden. To be sure, sometimes we made him angry by scuffling about the gravel which he had been rolling, or by running away with a curious instrument of his, which he used to call his half-moon, and which we found very useful for digging in our own strangely cultivated gardens: but generally he was very good natured, and generally, I hope, we were civil to him; and he loved to talk, and we to listen to the story of the days of his youth, when he and his wife danced at the laying of the foundation-stone of the church; and he used to tell us how decently he

had brought up his family, and how much he had seen, and how very much he had done, and often concluded by lifting up his hands and exclaiming, "And I had nothing but what these little hands worked for." Oh! what a picture of an old man he was; small in stature, but of really a beautiful face, with flowing locks of shining white hair, and bright blue eyes, and a clear and healthy, but still fair complexion. Oh! what a picture of an old man he was! I have his figure before me now, as on one bright Whit-Monday, when the clubs and their bands of music were coming across the green to church, he stood pulling the bell outside the belfry-door; for, amidst his many avocations, he was bell ringer; at least if ours may be called bell-ringing, when we boast but of two bells—one great and one small. He was tolling the little bell then, to call the congregation to church; and hearing the glad sound of the procession and the loyal

music, and wishing to be there to spy, he wisely bethought him of the expedient of pulling the bell-rope, which fortunately was long enough, through the door into the church-yard. And there he stood in the sunshine, the fresh wind blowing his long silver hair, pulling with all his might, and his head turned quite the other way, to gaze at the floating flags and the thronging people; and no doubt he complimented himself at thus having found a plan to combine duty and pleasure. He used to look very handsome in his Sunday dress, but perhaps more picturesque in his still more old-fashioned working-day costume, with his brown gaiters and his blue woollen apron; how pleased we used to be to help him, when at Christmas he came to gather sprays of our variegated holly, to help dress up the church; and year after year, it gave our young hearts a momentary pang to hear him say, "Ah! I shall never trouble ye again;" and I

remember the very last time he came tottering on crutches, and when we had filled his apron, and tied it up for him as well as we could, as he was slowly going away down the narrow path leading to the church-yard gate, the apron gave way, and all the laurel and holly-boughs fell down. We gathered round him, and filling our pinbefores, carried the evergreens for him into the church, and he said once more, and for the last time, "God bless ye all!" and "thank ye, I shall never trouble ye again!"

Poor old Thomas! he never did; but that is not so many years ago, and he might be called the first of his family—certainly the first I remember, and the eldest buried under the shadow of this chestnut; the first in point of age I mean, for his grandson Philip died several years before him. But are not any of his own children left? Has not our clerk mistaken? And his son—the man who is to

be buried to-night, what is become of all his children? For he had as fair a family, and that not of little delicate ones—not of tender infants, grouped together like a spray of blossoms, of which we are sure that not half can come to maturity. No; his “flowers were in flushing”—all grown up to man and woman’s estate. “They were five fair children, beautiful young men and women,” said the heart-broken mother; and it was not only the mother’s partial heart that thought so; every one says, that three of them were very handsome young men, and that the young women were two of the prettiest in the country. And is there not one to come to his funeral to-night? Not one! not one! Philip, the eldest, has been dead almost twenty years, and he was nearly twenty-one when he died. In common with most young men of that age, he was of a joyous and enterprising temper, and in his health possessed of an

unbroken flow of high spirits ; but he had also, what in men is not so common, a remarkably tender affection to his mother and to his old grandmother, who, in return, were dotingly attached to their handsome and dutiful child. He was one of the first scholars brought up in our parish school, and by all, the very little account I can collect of him, he did it credit. He could read his Bible with ease ; he did read it, and from that unfailling source derived that consolation for which he found much need during his lingering and wasting sickness. It was consumption ; but consumption is a flatterer, and after many changes, much weakness, and great apparent recovery of strength, he one morning found himself so well, as earnestly to request his mother's permission to join a party of bell-ringers, on occasion, I believe, of some victory. He would not go, he said, if she said " no ;" but he earnestly begged her to say, " yes."

How could his mother refuse him? and then she had nursed him in his illness so long, and was so pleased to see him better. Dear creature! she could not bear to disappoint him; yet as she tied an additional handkerchief round his neck, and bade God bless him, the tears came into her eyes, and dimmed her sight as she watched him down the road. He promised to come back early, and he kept his word; but it was only to say, with the poor huntsman, in that old and touching ballad,

“ O, I am weary mother! make my bed soon,

“ For I'm weary, I'm weary, and fain would lie down.”

Poor Philip! This happened, I think, in the winter; and he died, says the headstone, on the 10th March, 1811, aged 21 years.

Then died one whose very name is forgotten. In the leaf of the old Bible it was perhaps written—doubtless it was engraven in his mother's heart, but the first

record was worthless to the strangers into whose hands it fell, and they have erased it; and for the second, love is stronger than death, and we will trust that the spirit which cherished the memory of her lost ones to the brink of the grave, has ere this recognized them in that land where remembrance is exchanged for presence—where “an enemy never entered, and from whence a friend never went away.”*

Then, but with the space of some years, they lost their daughter Elizabeth. She was for some time our next door neighbour. She came a bride to the pleasant cottage afterwards inhabited by the sailor and his wife, and she lived there in great comfort during her short married life. Like all her family, she was remarkably pretty. Certainly there is something extremely lovely in that clear delicacy of complexion, that sparkling brilliancy of eye, and that changeful but always beau-

* Bp. Jeremy Taylor.

tiful colour, which we usually see in consumptive patients. Within the first year of her marriage she became a mother, and from that time the sweet flower faded. The eye became more glittering, the blue veins more clearly defined on the pure temple and down the thin cheek; the colour was brighter but more changeful, and the delicate lips became yet more delicate and paler. We were sent over once with some little present to her, and young as we were—my dear companion will, I dare say, remember how much we were struck by the contrast which her beauty presented to that of her young neighbour, Honour, who chanced just then to bring her in a nosegay, such as country people make of marygolds and thyme, boy's love, gillyflower, and sweet peas. (Poor Honour! she must have missed that sunny garden of hers, when she went to live in the narrow close street in town.) Perhaps I have never seen two

prettier women together since. Honour, a healthy, cheerful looking country girl; tall and well formed, with bright auburn hair, merry blue eyes, and a rosy colour; and the other so sadly, so touchingly beautiful: her dark hair braided back, as if lest the weight of the heavy curls should increase the fever that swelled the veins and flushed the pale cheek. Her attenuated hands and her weak arms, sinking, as it were, from the weight of the small infant which yet they clasped so lovingly, and on which her bright melancholy eyes gazed with such unspeakable tenderness. And Honour stood looking on the form which was "wearing away, like snaw wreath in thaw," with an expression of interest and compassion which added grace to her beauty. It was a sweet picture; I have not done it justice, but I think I shall never forget it. Poor Elizabeth! I hope and believe she never wanted sympathy or kindness; every

one was interested for her; for her kind husband and her poor baby.

Death is always awful: we weep indeed, and tremble, even when the Lord's blessing rests on the righteous as he goes "to his grave in a full age, like a shock of corn in his season;" but when the green ear is blighted, when the young tree is felled, when the wind sweeps over the budding flower, and it is gone, and the place thereof knows it no more; then indeed, in the expressive language of holy writ, "our hearts faint, and our eyes are dim, and even all the merry hearted do sigh."

Poor Elizabeth! many real mourners followed her to her grave, besides her husband, and her poor little girl, whose long white robe made a strange and sad contrast to the band of black love ribbon and the black rosette on her cap. It is a sad sight to see an infant in mourning for its mother, but it has been my lot to see

it very often. And yet it is something more strange and sadder still, to see the bending and tottering form of the parent come, time after time, to the grave in which he longs to rest himself; but of which those whom he expected to be the strength of his age, take a premature possession. How the poor mother must have trembled when she saw once more the dreaded and now well-known symptoms appear in her only remaining son. She nursed him, and watched by him, but it was hopelessly, or only with "the hope that keeps alive despair." From the hour that the cough came, she knew George could not live, but she prayed that he might be made fit to die. We know whose promise runs thus—"Whilst they are yet speaking, I will hear." So I have good reason to believe there was hope in his end, and after a while his mother was comforted; and she had still one dear daughter left. This was her

youngest, Susan, whom I remember seeing once, and only once. It was at the time of a contested election; and I recollect her blush and smile, as at her mother's bidding, she took off her bonnet to exhibit the shining blue ribbon, which one of our tory member's family had given her. All her relations, in common, I believe, with our parishioners in general, are attached—deservedly attached to that family, and to what we used to call the *high party*. Now, indeed, things are so strangely altered that we cannot exactly tell what to call ourselves. We *were* a very loyal parish, and so we *are*—"true blue" is our colour still—the colour of the gallant Falkland, and the colour of true faith, and of the unchanging sky. We may be in the minority, but we, who were born subjects to George the Third, cannot readily learn to speak evil of the rulers of our people. Oh! we feel ourselves "true blue" still; and truly, our

native member represented us at the last sessions.

We may yet see better times ; there are right spirits among us yet. How the people thronged to sign our petitions, surely with steady hearts, though by some unskilful hands. How we sent up parchment after parchment ; and one man, who had chanced to miss the opportunity of signing, ran six miles, during the time allowed for rest at noon, and finding the throng so great that then he could not accomplish his purpose, took the same run the next day, and succeeded. There were true hearts among us. Poor things ! their petitions deserved better treatment than they met with ; but God give us right Protestant feelings, and we shall be able to bear whatever may come.

But women, you think, have little to do with politics and state affairs. An Englishwoman, however, may be forgiven for feeling an impassioned love to her own

land—a deep grief when “any wrong her,” that will sometimes express itself in words. Though I will own, untimely attention to high affairs may carry her away from the duties of her narrow sphere, as it has me from my story, for indeed I have gone a great way from pretty Susan and her blue ribbon. She married, and went to live in town; she was very happy, I believe, and it seemed that the warm situation agreed with her better than the air of our bleak hills; and for some time there appeared cause to hope that she might yet be spared to nurse and comfort her old father and mother, in their last hours. She was now older than either of her brothers or her sister had lived to be, and every year added to her poor mother’s trembling hopes. She had a lovely baby too, and yet her strength returned, and she continued well. No wonder the poor mother flattered herself—no wonder she looked on this daughter as if all the love

she had ever borne to all her children was centred in her. But Susan again became a mother, and then the family disease showed itself in her constitution. Her mother endeavoured to say, "Thy will be done," but though the heart consented, the voice refused, and her utmost effort only enabled her, like Aaron, to "hold her peace." All care was taken of poor Susan; every effort made to save her, but in vain. She wasted away as the rest had done; she died, and was buried in a city church-yard, with her husband's family. Then her parents felt that all was over: so the earth was filled up, and the grieving mother turned away from the grave of her last child. To her, I doubt not, her heavy afflictions have been greatly blessed. She was humble and uncomplaining in her deportment, though indeed sometimes her heart appeared almost broken. She was very neat in her person, and to the last time I saw her, exhi-

hibited marks of having possessed that beauty which was so remarkable in her children.

I am sorry I know so little about her. It was my own fault, for I never went there without being welcomed ; and never read her a chapter or a psalm, but that she listened with quiet tears, which showed how deeply she was interested. She was, for her age, very infirm ; who could wonder at it, when she had so long had to say with Naomi, “ the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.” Yet weakly as she was, her death appears to me to have been almost sudden—at least I never heard of her being ill, until I also heard that no kindness and no attention from us could any more avail her. It is not the uncertainty of our own lives alone, but that also of others, which should make us remember, whilst we have time, “ to do good unto all men.” She died a few months since : her husband saw her laid

here with her children ; now the bell strikes out, and his own funeral is coming. There are a decent number of acquaintance and neighbours : they are grave and silent, but there is no expression of grief amongst them : there is no sorrowing brother or sister—no affectionate son—no weeping daughter there. And when the service is over, they will disperse quietly, mention him for a day or two, and then Phillip's name will be forgotten : no one will trouble himself to see it engraven in its place on the tomb-stone : the freshly-heaped earth will soon sink down to a level with the path beside it. Many will not observe it ; and a few, remembering who sleeps there, will feel that our clerk was right—" It is the grave of the last of the family."

March 5, 1830.

THE DORCAS MEETING.

“ Give wings to fancy, and among us come,
“ Tis near the hour, and we must soon attend ;
“ I'll introduce you : ‘ Gentlemen ! my friend ! ’ ”

CRABBE.

BY this time I fear you are beginning to think me a very dull companion, and indeed when I review the scenes which I have exhibited to you, I am almost disposed to plead guilty. Come, then, I will introduce you to a little of the gaiety of our parish—to the “ belle assemblée ” of our Dorcas Association. It is just the right time too, for the moon is at the full, and we, like the fairies, choose that pleasant hour for our nightly meetings : not

so much, however, for the romance, as for the safety and comfort of the thing. It is quite time to go, for it is long past four: show no city airs, if you please, at our early hours, and Thomas has been waiting and grumbling between the back door and the stable this quarter of an hour; and the little horse is harnessed, and the carriage is ready. You are astonished I see, but we do keep a carriage; only an open cart, but there is no time now for rude remarks, and we must make haste to clamber in: the easiest plan is to mount the leaping stock, against which the vehicle is drawn as closely as the horse will permit, and so step over the side into it. There are no seats, but you will find yourself wonderfully comfortable on the bundles of straw which, to do him justice, Thomas takes great pains in arranging on these occasions. He covers the bottom of the cart with hay, so that our feet are in no danger of becoming

cold, especially as by the time we are all in, we shall be pretty closely packed.

Having so convenient an equipage, we always consider it a point of politeness to offer a seat to our near neighbours, and now we are stopping for the purpose. "You are very full to-night," says our friend; "Susan shall go another time." "O no, no," say half a dozen voices at once; "dear little Susan must not be disappointed." "I can put her in the pocket of my plaid," said one: "We can pack Susan in the hay at the bottom," said another. So the little girl, who was beginning to look rather grave, was lifted in amongst us, I cannot exactly tell where. We were crowded to be sure, but on these occasions "the more, the merrier." Thomas banged the tail-board into its place, and in answer to one who, I shrewdly suspect, had no intention of exercising such self-denial, offered to walk, as the horse had so heavy a burden, replied in

that deep sepulchral tone, seldom heard indeed, but which those who have heard can scarcely forget, and which others can hardly fancy, "the horse can go well enough;" and then, with a sort of sneer at our want of taste, "you may ride if you please; I'd rather walk by half myself." Then he got up in front, and away we drove over the new stones and through the old ruts, at a rate that shook us, closely packed as we were. Some kept their seats on the sloping sides of the cart, from which the bundles of straw soon slip down, pretty well. Others slid down after them, making vain and repeated efforts to settle it and themselves as they were before; and the wiser part, remembering that those who are on the ground can go no lower, fairly seated themselves on the hay at the bottom. All called to Thomas to go more slowly, but he made a slight mistake in the meaning of our entreaty, and went faster and faster; and we were

every moment more and more shaken, and jolted, and tumbled.

But we are going to an evening party, and you are wondering how we manage with regard to our dress. I will tell you a secret ; if you wear no finery, you have none to spoil ; if you deck yourself in no jewellery, you can lose none ; and if you carefully pin up your clean gown, and put a responsible cloak over it, you may ride in the rain a long way, in a jolting cart, and yet get it neither soiled nor torn. We were very merry, and rather noisy, I am afraid, when we first set out, but now, don't you observe, we are getting grave, and really, strange to say, almost silent. It is beginning to rain a little, so we wrap up more closely and sit more steadily, for I have observed ladies can, on most occasions, be more or less shaken as they please ; and now we beg Thomas, whose horse has slackened his pace, to go faster, as just now we desired him to go more

slowly, and we long to be set down. I can forgive our driver his apparent sullenness, for really he has very contradictory orders to obey, and a numerous and somewhat unreasonable set of requests to comply with; and the road is very heavy here, so the horse and his dissatisfied burden flounder on, from one rut to another, in singular style.

It rains faster, and begins to be dark and uncomfortable. I am glad we are at our journey's end; we shall find nothing dark or uncomfortable here. There is a hearty welcome, and our damp things are soon taken off, and we are settled in a room with a blazing fire, round a table on which are plenty of candles and the great basket of work. Some are already employed there, but kind eyes look up as we enter, and kind hands are extended, and we feel that we are amongst friends. Then we apply diligently to business, and I must say for the credit of our little party,

it is not only nominally a working society. It is a point of courtesy to leave the flannel articles to be made by the elder ladies; I beg pardon, the ladies who wear spectacles: not that we doubt their ability to do the more delicate work as neatly as the most bright-eyed amongst us, but they profess to like this best; and of one thing I am sure, that if the younger members of our Association can in any way consult their comfort, it must be their pleasure to do so, for they know how highly they are honoured by the company of such elders, and they do indeed feel grateful for it. We are all settled quietly at work at a little after five, and though sometimes debates run rather high, and one could not help allowing that if we ladies talked only three at a time, we might be better understood, yet we were getting on with our various articles of dress, when the tea came in at half-past six.

We lose no time, because we do not

remove our work, but go on with it between the acts, and there are very often pleasant private conversations carried on between those who happen to sit next each other ; many kind feelings expressed, and sometimes words of consolation or advice exchanged. I hope we do, and I am sure we ought to feel something more than the regard of mere acquaintance to the members of our Dorcas Society ; to me, certainly, that evening is one of the most agreeable week-day evenings in the whole month, and that party the pleasantest I ever attend. After tea there is generally a proposal made for reading, and I always observe, the more interesting the book may be, the more rapidly the work goes on. In selecting books for reading on such occasions, it is well to remember that "the time is short," and that whilst the ostensible purpose of our meeting is to provide for the temporal wants of our poor neighbours, any opportunity for our

own improvement is to be thankfully embraced. But the reading never lasts all the evening, and sometimes little Susan varies our amusement by repeating the beautiful hymns which she has learnt so perfectly, and repeats with such wonderful propriety. Little dear! may she always have as deep a feeling of what is right as she now appears to possess, and may she always be as little ashamed of expressing it.

But you are glancing round at our circle, and you think that amongst so many young ladies there must be frequent changes. Not very frequent; though indeed the flower of our party left us soon after we first assembled. Now there are rumours of speedy changes, but we must not listen lightly to reports. To be sure we cannot help observing how, for a long time, one who is, as she well deserves to be, a general favourite, has been fetched home in the evening by some kind invisi-

ble. "*The person*"—how lucky that the word is common gender—always preferring to wait outside. It would be better, we thought, to come in, but Kate never seemed to think at all about it, and, of course, it was no business of ours. She was never one moment putting on her things, and whilst others were folding up their work, or taking leave, she was dressed and gone. But the very last time, by some mischance or other—either because the dogs in the yard would not bear a stranger there, or that the servant was particularly stupid, or particularly determined—"the person" was prevailed upon to go into the little parlour, where we had left our bonnets. Our pretty friend rushed out of the room where we were sitting, perhaps to send him back again; but it was too late; we were all on the point of going. I thought it would have been kinder to have given her two minutes the start of us; and really it was not so

much curiosity, as love of adventure, that made me run down with the rest. And there, in the farthest corner of the room, stood "the person,"—a handsome looking youth, wrapped in a picturesque furred cloak—the very person we might have expected to see, yet to whose name, when any one has been rude enough to question her about him, she has invariably answered with the most enviable self-possession. O poor Kate! how pretty and how ashamed she looked; what a very great hurry she was in, and how she trembled when one of the more stayed of the party kindly detained her, to give her a pin for her shawl, and to advise her to tie her bonnet. She need not have been in such a fright; she was with friends: I am sure if they all felt as I did, they were glad to see her in such good company, and sincerely wished the young couple joy. But it is almost time to leave off work; the more nimble have accomplished theirs,

and the others are tired, and must take their unfinished portions home ; and here comes the neat servant maid, with refreshments. It is not printed in our reported rules, indeed, but one of our bye-laws provides that, in order to prevent any thing like emulation or extravagance in our entertainments, the wine and cake, &c. shall be home made, and the fruit such as in its season can be readily procured. There are but few who think it a duty to keep to the letter of this rule, though it is an useful one in its intention certainly. But the most part appear to feel that, on this occasion, they cannot possibly be too liberal : there is no emulation, I hope, but a great deal of hospitality amongst us, so that when we part, it is always with even kinder feelings than when we met, and I always go home believing the committee of our Dorcas Society the most agreeable in the known world. We need not be anxious about

our charioteer, though it must be nearly nine o'clock. He will be punctual, as I dare say he is impatient to have done with us. Hark! there he comes lumbering down the lane. No rain; the clouds are flying away before the fresh wind, and the moon, the beautiful silver moon, is at her highest.

But when seven or eight people pack into a cart, to be jolted along a very rough road, there is neither time nor silence for romantic admiration of the moon, though I should observe for the credit of the party, we do generally endeavour to be quiet and orderly on the king's highway. We drop one after another of our party on our way home, and by the time the horse gives himself and his master a shake of congratulation at our own door, it is nearly a quarter past nine. There is, you see, even in this age of civilization, one out-of-the-way place in the world, where such hours are still kept. They are the

most natural, however, the most reasonable, the most healthy, and certainly the most agreeable ; and we are at home in proper time, and, I trust, in no improper temper, for that calm and holy assembling of ourselves together which, in sorrow and in joy, we have found to bring so great a blessing—which no business should ever be allowed to prevent, and which that cannot be really pleasure which would interrupt.

March, 1830.

BLIND SARAH.

" These eyes, that dazzled now and weak,
At glancing notes in sunshine wink,
Shall see the king's full glory break,
Nor from the blissful vision shrink.

Tho' scarcely now their lagged glance
Reach to an arrow's flight, that day
They shall behold, and not in trance,
The region " very far away."

KEBLE'S CHRIST. YEAR, 4th Sunday in Adv.

I Had a pleasant walk after church last Sunday. I am very fond of quiet and fresh air, and they seem especially suitable to my feelings after evening service, after joining the earnest prayers, and listening to the solemn sermon. I am sorry to confess, that too often in the

summer, the only quiet walk is to be found in our church-yard and our own sweet garden, for the bright weather sends out into our fields and lanes, groups of those of whom the utmost stretch of charity cannot prevent our feeling, "they are doing their own works, and speaking their own words, and taking their own pleasure on God's holy day." But it is yet too early in the year for any of these noisy parties, and this evening, though very soothing to my mind, was perhaps to some, more mirthful, cold, and grey, and gloomy. Indeed the mist, that threatened to become rain, as I stood hesitatingly in our home field, would perhaps have sent me back, if I had not made a promise to blind Sarah which I was anxious to fulfill. But I was glad I went on, for by the time the little white gate of the lane swung behind me, the cloud past by, and the yellow sunshine streamed from the blue western downs through the leaf-

less hedge, and across my path. The birds, grey linnets I think they were, (the first songsters I have heard this year, except the robin) kept up an animated conversation on either side of me, in very sweet tones, and by short addresses to each other, which, I doubt not, each well understood. Spring is really come, and I know it by the sign of our village children; you can set your foot on two daisies at once; so I should be quite sure, even if the vividly green leaves of the shining slippery dock, and the elegant wild parsley springing through the moss, whose seeds are nearly ripe, did not confirm the opinion. Then as I came near the ivied arch which leads to the farm, I was agreeably surprised by hearing a thrush singing its song of thanks, for the unripe berries which have been its chief supply through this long hard winter. There were a few sheep, lying in a green pasture on my right hand; but few, in-

deed, yet on such an evening enough to remind me of the beautiful 23rd Psalm, and "The Lord, my shepherd," &c.

Poor blind Sarah ! if she could have had a glance at them, it could not have failed to remind her of that Psalm too, for it is a very favourite one with her, and when I have read the last verse, " Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life," she generally assents with earnestness, saying, " They have followed me, my dear ; they have followed me." And whilst I have listened to her story, I have assented too, and felt " so they have ;" and the more I consider the ways of God in his providence, the more I am amazed at the wisdom and mercy, with which, according to a homely but expressive phrase, " he fits the back to the burden." It seems to me that, if some persons with whom I have conversed, possessing, nevertheless, the same high principle of action, and the same

strong consolation, had had half to bear that poor Sarah has borne cheerfully, they must have fainted under it.

She was not born blind, yet she has no remembrance of material objects, as she became so during her infancy. Whether this is an alleviation of her loss or otherwise, is probably questionable. Rogers would consider it an addition to the evil, as of so many things she can have no "*Pleasures of memory.*" Her father and mother died, and left her as she said, and her lip quivered a moment, "to God and the wide world, at twelve years old." She had brothers and sisters, but some went to service, and some to sea, and some married, and "it could not be expected," she adds, "that they having their own bread to get, would be burthened with me a blind girl." Indeed she seems to think that she was quite as well able to take care of herself, as they to take care of her. It is curious to hear her list of

accomplishments. "I was strong and hearty," she says, "and I was afraid of nothing: I could clean furniture beautifully, and I could scrub a room, and nurse a child better than many who could see." Besides she has been used to brew and bake, and speaks of her attainments in those particulars with great satisfaction. She has been preserved from ever meeting with any accident by fire, and no child left with her met with any harm, though in her youth she was constantly intrusted by her neighbours with the care of theirs. She could nurse with quite as much ease, and, according to her own account, with more pleasure than hireling nurses generally feel: and I remark here, what appears singular, and yet what I believe inquiry will prove to be true, that blind women are often particularly pleased with the company of young children, and wonderfully expert in attending to them. There is a blind girl in our parish at

present, who gains her livelihood as poor Sarah did, and is never better pleased than when she has one child in her arms, and another at her side. But blind Sarah was in her way, a milliner and mantua maker. She can cut out any article of dress she wants, taking the pattern in paper first, and can make and mend, in a way, which would put most of the *seeing* women of our parish to shame.

As long as she can remember, she says, she was particular about her appearance; and when she was young, the neighbours would look after her, and wonder who kept her so nice, and whether she could possibly dress *herself* with so much exactness: and that she observes, "was great encouragement, I could not be untidy after that." When I reached her house after my walk, I found her sitting alone in her neat kitchen, the floor sanded and the fire-irons polished; every cup and glass, each exactly in its own place; her neat

dark gown pinned quite evenly, and her cap, handkerchief, and apron, as stiff and clean and clear as they could have been on her wedding day. On her wedding day? Yes! blind Sarah was married. You are not more astonished than she was, when the proposal was made her. She was very grateful, but expressed great wonder at her intended husband's rashness. "It was not likely," she says with great simplicity, "that I should be able to give satisfaction—I could clean my room to please myself—so I told him, but how could he be so foolish as to think of such a poor creature as I, when there were so many who could see."

But when all the objections in such a case, arise from a woman's sense of her own unworthiness for the honour intended, there is no great fear but that they may be over-ruled, and so it was now. "God had promised to be a father to the fatherless," was Geoffrey's answer, and God would

make good his word by fitting him as long as he lived to be a kind guardian to the blind orphan. So they married, and he kept his promise to the utmost. I have heard of true love, and I have seen it; but truer I never expect to see, than that which subsisted between this singular couple. Geoffrey was a collier, and like most of that portion of those men who work under ground, he was grave and thoughtful. His affection to his wife, however, was so uncommon, as to carry in it something of a romantic character; and his religion was as enthusiastic, as sincere religion can be. He was many years older than Sarah, and he possessed some property, two houses and their little bit of garden ground, which he settled on her. In one of these they lived, and to hear poor Sarah describe it, you would really believe she was speaking of some green spot in fairy land, or some dwelling in Arcadia. "My home was so beautiful," she says, "that strangers used

to stand and look at it, and I used to hear them wonder how the blind woman could keep it so—and we had all kinds of flowers, and my husband made me a beautiful arbour to sit in, of roses, and yellow and white jessamine, and honeysuckle, and it was very pleasant!" Poor thing! I should like to see that bower in my mind's eye as she sees it. Who knows? Fancy is more gorgeous than reality; perhaps her view of a pleasant and beautiful bower, is more lovely than any I can ever have, because where real roses are, I must see blight, and where there are earth's flowers, I must see dust and drooping, and withering.—Her husband was in the habit of reading to her in the word of God, but his bible was small and old, and she determined to make him a present of one.

At this time she went out every day to wash, and unknown to him laid by a small portion of her weekly earnings for the purpose. It was a long time before the

pence and sixpences amounted to the requisite sum, for she intended to give him a large handsome bible ; but she kept her secret ; and the day on which she and a neighbour went to pay the money and fetch home the book, and the evening when she gave it to her husband, are still remembered as among the most joyful of her life. She has been for many years a thankful and cheerful Christian—but the days of her married life were really days of joy. “They were ten of the happiest years,” she says, “that I think any one ever could spend on earth.” The bond of affection must be strengthened by other than merely earthly ties, or it will decay like all that is of earth ; and Geoffrey and Sarah learnt to love each other more and more, because they were companions to the house of God, and because month after month found them kneeling with thankful hearts at his table.

And here, perhaps, it may not be out of

place to mention the delight, with which she speaks of that holy ordinance, and of one particular circumstance connected with it. All other things she *fancies*, but when the sun shines through the chestnut leaves, that shade the eastern window, on the spotless table, the gleam of the fair linen and the sheen of the plate and chalice, are *really* presented to her dim eye. Then and then only she *knows* what it is to see. As "the gentle foot-step" is "gliding round," it is not by her ear alone that she is sensible when the precious memorials are about to be presented to her. "The light shineth in a dark place." "It is a bright speck," she says, "but I am ravished." This was her strong expression, "I am ravished with thinking how much broader the light of heaven will be."

Sarah is never weary of talking of her husband, or of telling how very kind he was to her. How he thought every thing

she did was well done, and always said no one ever made his clothes, or mended them to please him, half so well as his blind wife. And she takes great pleasure in showing the handsome clock which he gave her, teaching her how to feel the hour and how to wind it up. "Did you never break it?" I asked. "O no, my dear," was the answer, "I never break any thing, my thoughts always go with what I am doing, ('it would be well,' think the grave mistresses of families, 'if all giddy young people understood the secret') and I set about every thing very slowly, and I don't break any thing once in seven years."

But ten years is a long time for happiness to last on earth, and Sarah's time of trouble was come. Her kind husband was taken ill, and after six weeks died. He died many years before I can recollect; and I cannot tell you much on the subject, because pleased as she is to talk of him

generally, and cheerfully as she tells the rest of her story ; when she comes to mention his death, it is with such agonized remembrance, and such deep feeling, that I should be hard-hearted indeed if I allowed her to proceed. Of this much, however, I have been assured ; the God who knoweth whereof we are made, raised up friends for his servants in this time of trial. The best medical advice was freely procured for the one, and the most comforting kindness was shown to the other ; and “He who never leaveth, nor forsaketh,” guided his departing servant through the valley of the shadow of death, giving him not only a peaceful but a triumphant departure. It is more than two and twenty years since Sarah prest her husband’s hand for the last time ; yet still, she says, she dreads the day to come round, and at that time she always prays very much for strength that she may not sink under the remembrance, and “when I go to

my bed at night," she says, "I always pray that I may not think so much of my dead husband as of my living Lord; besides I am getting very old now, and in heaven my husband and his blind wife will see each other." But if the loss of a friend is at any time a very, very great affliction, it certainly may be aggravated when the loss of the means of life is consequent upon it; and poor Sarah has known in the latter years of her life much pecuniary distress. She was obliged to rent a house nearer the place where she worked, and to let her own two houses she soon found would presently ruin her. She generally had tenants to be sure, but she had almost insurmountable difficulties in getting her rent; and when they did pay her, her outgoings for repairs would always nearly equal her income. And then her unprincipled tenants were always taking advantage of her, leaving without giving notice, and breaking windows wholesale, and pulling

down walls, as if for the very amusement of the thing. Still whilst she had health she could work, and though sometimes she must have lived very hardly, she never complained.

At last, after an illness, it was thought reasonable to make her some allowance from the parish, and for some time no objection was made. But then we had a new overseer, a "little industrious man," as he calls himself, very energetic and always busy, who came into office with full purpose of rectifying all abuses, and full confidence in his powers to do so. He resolved that Sarah should have no more "parish pay," as it is called in these days, until she gave up her houses. I do not blame him as much as he is generally blamed,—right, I doubt not, was on his side; but for poor Sarah to part with the houses which her husband had thanked God that he had to leave her; Oh! it went near to break her heart. For a long

time she would not yield, and during the many weeks in which no allowance was made her, she was reduced to great distress. At last want of bread made it necessary for her to give way. She sold her houses, and has been living on the price of them now, nearly two years; but now the money is waxing very low, and when it is all gone, I suppose she must apply again to the parish, but they can give her very little, and her working days are over. I cannot tell how she will contrive to keep out of the work-house, and to go in there would be indeed a very great sorrow; for now she can receive her visitors, and smile when they admire the order of her little establishment; she can pack up her tea, sugar, &c. in her "ridicule," as she calls her old covered basket, and go to spend every afternoon with her crippled neighbour, the sailor's widow, and she can listen with pleased attention to the tracts which, on such occasions, Mary reads to her; and she can take a turn in the fresh air or the

sunshine, whenever she pleases. Oh! what a charm there is in that—to go out or come in when one will, no man making one afraid. Not that I have a word to say against the keeper of our poor-house. But a poor-house is only one remove from a prison, so the poor think at least, and so they hate it. Oh! I hope poor Sarah will not be obliged to go there. But why should I trouble myself about it, she is not so anxious. “I will surely do thee good,” was the promise of her covenant God to her, and “good will be word of the Lord.” I am sure none ever trusted in him and was confounded. The God of the gospel dispensation is the God of nature also, and that sweet Sunday evening’s walk declared his truth to me, for according to his unfailing promise, the spring time was coming back again.

The moon which he set for certain seasons hung, like a dim silver lamp in the eastern heaven before me, and the sun, which he taught to know his going down,

cast the lengthening shadows across the ancient hills as he did six thousand years ago. I stopped at an open gate, and looked toward the long line of southern downs, and could plainly distinguish the outline of the grey Cairn on the summit. Man passes away, I thought, and his monument remains only to bid us ask, "who lies here?" But God says, "I am the same, I change not,"—and in whom is it that the Christian thus puts trust? In the Great Spirit of the American woods, or the Being that Socinianism proposes to itself as an object of worship? O no, we feel whose "Spirit rules universal nature." "His who wore the platted thorns with bleeding brows."* And Oh! thou God and man, it is because thou Jesus Christ art the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, that we feel as David did, that we shall never see the righteous forsaken.

* Cowper.

So it was with pleasant thoughts that I came quietly through the lanes and up the silent home fields, and my remembrances of my friend Sarah, further arranged themselves in the following verses, which, by way of variety, I here offer to you :—

THE BLIND COMMUNICANT.

The mother led her sightless child
Forth, in the fields to play ;
And cheer'd with voice of kindness mild,
Along her shadow'd way ;
And gave her flowers of varied hue,
Which the blind child might never view.

But she grew up, and loved the song
Of the glad birds to hear ;
And roam'd the scented heath along,
In spring-time of the year,
But knew not how those flowers were fair,
Nor how the bright moths flutter there.

To childhood's voice as still she grew,
That woman's heart would swell ;
Yet the bright face she might not view,
Nor the young features tell ;

But to her heart, the form would strain,
And love the clasp, that press'd again.

But most she lov'd the one kind voice
That bade her glad heart bound
One step, that made her soul rejoice
With its so well known sound.
She fancied what that form might be,
And lov'd the smile, she could not see.

She never saw—nor sparkling day
Rainbow, nor morning's grace,
Nor brighter than Eve's brightest ray,
Affection's beaming face.
But yet to her, one gleam was given,
In earth's dim walk, a glance at Heaven.

For when the noon-day's glory bright,
Shone on the chalice fair
On priestly vestment pure and white,
And she was kneeling there ;
One moment on the quivering eye,
The holy light shone tremblingly.

O ! blest through this dim world of ours,
To follow calmly still—
The star that shines on Zion's towers,
And lights up Judah's hill.

Undazzled by earth's meteor gleams,
Or bursting flowers, or sparkling streams.

O blest ! with faith's unchanging gaze
That star alone to see—

And so, through this life's varied maze,
Press forward stedfastly.

Until, upon the strengthen'd sight,
Bursts forth in Heaven, the Lamb ! the Light !

March, 1830.

THE STRAWBERRY FEAST.

"And still the green is bright with flowers,
And dancing through the sunny hours
Like blossoms from enchanted boughs—

On a sudden wafted by,
Obedient to the changeful air,
And proudly feeling they are fair,
Sport bird and butterfly.
But where is the tiny hunter rout,
That revel'd on with dance and shout
Amid their airy prey?"—WILSON.

YOU have given me a subject, on which to write, my dear friend, and I will not refuse it, though there are reasons why it is not a favourable one for me, and why remembrances must arise to my mind, little suited to my joyous title. Anniversary days have been sometimes likened to the stones erected along the path of our

journey, and whilst they remind us that we are come another mile nearer the end of it; they also make us sigh at the observation, that some, who commenced our way with us, have ceased to travel in our company; but such an anniversary as our Strawberry Feast was, planned in early childhood, is more like the pole, erected in joy and glee in the sun-shine of May morning, but from which as we gaze at it, even in the following summer, the garland flowers are fallen off, and the dancers are gone.

Yet why should I begin in a melancholy strain? When the May-pole is lifted into its place, it is with a shout of rejoicing; and bright wild flowers are hung about it; and glad faces look up at it; and there was nothing but joy in the first celebration of the Strawberry Feast.

I do not remember the first time, nor I suppose can you, for we were very little children when it was proposed by one,

always anxious and able to give pleasure, that once in every summer, we should make an excursion to the cottage of an old woman at the other end of our parish, to drink tea,—the materials for our meal being carried by ourselves; and to enjoy the particularly fine fruit, with which her hilly and sunny garden would supply us. But in many ensuing summers you will recollect the joy expressed, when the day was really fixed. On the preceding evening, how anxiously we watched the sunset, and foretold fine weather, however it threatened rain,—or feared rain, however glowing and glorious the setting sun might be. How contradictory children are! Some of us are not very different now. And when the day really came, how suspiciously we questioned every gentle and well-intentioned cloud that ventured within our ken; and with what dismay we noticed even the cooling and glittering shower, that but for a minute dimmed the bright sunshine.

Ah! so we did! So we do! for we are human beings still. Still we tremble when the dark cloud hangs on our horizon, though mercy's covenant rainbow be painted on it; and still we shrink from the storm, though we know that it comes from heaven, and will descend in showers of blessing.

At last, the morning past, and the lessons were ended. Children now, I understand, such is the "march of intellect," delight in their tasks, and tell their parents in the letters they send them, that "they are absorbed in their studies." So I hear, at least, but in my day it was not so. You will candidly own with me, that to us, as Pollok says, "*Tasks were heavy*," but the labour for that day was over, and the trouble for that day past; and we, at any rate, had wisdom enough then, not to add to our grievances by looking forward. Then came the pleasant business of watching those who were really busy, pack up the

tea, and sugar, and cream, &c. &c., and happy, and a person of great consequence, was the one who was sent over to the shop for the new loaf of baker's bread. "Adulterated," says Accum, but infinitely preferable, we thought, to the stale and more wholesome home-baked, which served for ordinary occasions. At last, it was four o'clock, and we set out. Once or twice, I think we went in the cart, and were driven by the old farmer.

He was a specimen of what one expects to see in a gentleman's servant; in many respects far superior to our present chaperon. Grave and neat in his dress, and though rather peevish perhaps, with troublesome children, very respectful to his superiors. Poor old man! I saw him the other day, and he wears well. His hair is scarcely thinner, or more hoary than when he lived with us; and when I met him, his blue eyes looked up with a kinder expression than I used to think it in their

power to bestow. Yet I always liked him, and was quite glad to see him look so cheerful; for he has had troubles lately, such as go near to break a man's heart, and yet such as a man would rather his dearest friend did not know. Poor old farmer! perhaps that was the reason we met so kindly; we had both sorrowed since we parted last. But in those days things were different; for though you and I fully agree that children have troubles, yet we did not then muse upon them when they were not actually troubling us; and as we went up one hill and down another, and up and down again, before we stopped at the bottom of the shaded lane, that led to old Betty's cottage,—we felt so very joyous, that had the king passed in his chariot and eight, (Oh! what an adventure that would have been,) he might have moved our admiration certainly, but I believe not our envy. We went to the same place, I think, for several years; and the old wo-

man used to receive us in her neatly sand-ed kitchen, all her furniture in its holiday polish, and herself in her Sunday dress; we used greatly to admire the gaiety of her tea-service, and the flavour of her fruit; and once in particular, I remember we found great pleasure in the discovery of a bank, joining the wall of the cottage on one side, down which we could scramble, and find our way round the house to a little window at the back, where sat the old woman's son, a cobbler, at work. That was certainly considered a wonderful discovery, and a great amusement; but, I think, it was not till old Betty became too infirm to receive us, and the meeting was adjourned to the house below the hanging gardens, beside the river, that we found out all the pleasures of that evening. We could not ride there to be sure, but you know how lovely the walk is, down the fields on a summer's evening, and through that deep and stony lane, "the most

extraordinary path," your friend W—— said, "that he had ever heard called passable."

Even now, though the tasteless hand of a waywarden has been there, and smoothed it in some degree; and though three or four very ugly houses,—I will not call them cottages,—have been perched on the banks, as is the fashion of the people here, wherever they find waste ground, and whenever they can collect stones and lime sufficient, without asking leave or license of the lord of the manor, much less of poet or painter; still the lane has many beauties, steep and broken banks, and pieces of rock, in some parts bare, and in others wreathed with ivy and woodbine, and tufted with dwarf oaks and hazels; and still in the time of the winter rains, the stream, which has been forced on one side and covered over, asserts its ancient right to the middle of the way, and gushes free, and clear, and sparkling, rejoicing down,

down, making again uneven and rough, the path, which a vestry meeting had ordered to be smooth, and dancing and dashing in defiance even of a waywarden. The scene of our festivities was a large lofty room, in an awkwardly built house, designed originally for the agent of a certain concern which failed, as many other concerns have done ; so that for years the extensive works connected with it have lain void ; offering irresistible, or rather, unresisted temptation to some of our lawless people for breaking windows, carrying away tiles, and stealing old iron : but the great house was let to a poor, but very respectable family, who thankfully allowed us the use of their large room on these occasions. It was a curious old place altogether ; but its chief charm was the garden, built according to the taste of the times, sixty years ago. Perhaps, I should have said laid out, but there were so many flights of stone steps leading through brick arches, to

broad straight walks one above another; and so many square summer-houses with stone walls, and square doors and windows, that your first thought was of the buildings: and stiff and formal enough it must have looked when it was first planned. But now that the brick arches were falling to decay, and ornamented with faithful wall-flower, and wreathed and half covered with ivy, that the summer-houses have lost many of their straight lines, and that old trees shaded, and jessamine and wild climatis concealed the rest; and the steps were so broken, that we were obliged to be careful how we ascended them;—it had become interesting from its appearance of antiquity, and it offered wild and strange scenery to those who were old enough to love the picturesque,—and danger and difficulty enough for those who were so young as to delight in adventure. For when we reached the top of the last flight of tottering steps, we found ourselves in a

wilderness, where up the steep side of the hill, grew untrimmed bushes of red and white roses, tangled with the wild bramble, and overtopped by stately old pear trees; and there were overgrown branches of all sorts of luxuriant lilac, and the beautiful jessamine, untrimmed for years and years, threw itself on the long grass at the foot of the moss-grown trees, as if in despair of finding support, and hopelessly longing for sunshine. Then, when we had pushed our way through these, we came amongst the underwood hazel bushes, scarcely taller than the giant docks and nettles that grew amongst them; and many a frock was torn, and many a tumble we met with, before we reached the arched summer-house, with the bath in the middle, at the very top of the hill. And, Oh! what a view we had then. The steep and singular garden up which we had just climbed; the old buildings and tall chimneys clustered together so very far below us; the barren and quarried hill, with its

yellow spots of gorse and broom, and its purple shade of heath, raising itself above the dark heaps of dross on our own side; and then the river, the beautiful, soft, flowing river that we have all loved so well, laving as kindly our rough and barren banks, and holding its pure mirror to us, as truly as to the embellished and fertile scenery on the other side; and how clearly we saw every reversed image of the trees in the little copse-wood beyond,—the thriving willow, the silver stem of the beech, and the red seed of the maple; and how very pretty we always thought the little farmhouse looked, that stands amongst the poplar trees; and we liked it all the better, because it was a porter's lodge once, to the monastery which in old time stood a little to the west of it; and of which we can still trace two or three ruined buttresses in the next field to that, where those aged elms grow, which formed part of the avenue to the gateway.

We could not look on such green fields

and such pleasant lanes, and not long to be there, so we used to hurry our tea, that we might have time for a walk before the strawberries were ready. Not a brisk half hour's walk, such as we were obliged to take for exercise every day, but one, long, and rambling, and loitering. On the other side of the river too, where we went so seldom, and we might load ourselves with blue-bells, and red maple seeds, and crooked pieces of sticks, and moss, and snail shells; and we might run out of the way after the moths and butterflies, and we might stop to watch and wonder at the shining beetles, with their quivering and jointed antennæ, like lordly crests,—for they are the knights in black armour of the insect world. Oh! the wonders we saw. The delight of those walks to us when we were children, and even when we ceased to be children, you know how very pleasant they used to be to us. For she whose company is at all times a pleasure, was

accustomed to join us then, and any others for whom we had particular esteem or value ; generally F——, and more than once your kind friends W—— and N——.

You know how we enjoyed those evenings. You remember the sloping and silent field, where the pear-trees grow, and where we sat so long by the side of the sparkling mill-stream. You know the narrow road where the limes are planted ; and the wide pasture where the quiet cattle are ; and you can see in your mind's eye, the stile and the low wall on which we have all rested so often, at the top of the steep wood where we used to gather the pensile flowers of sorrel and wood anemone, and where the stately fox-gloves grow in such wonderful and gorgeous luxuriance. But you recollect also the elastic foot, that bounded down that path, and must never bound there again. You remember the light form that climbed the topmost trees' highest bough, and gloried in the danger.

You can hear, even now, the shout of the clear sweet voice that is hushed for ever. You shudder at the remembrance of the daring, with which that light-hearted and dauntless one rocked our boat, as it glided over the calm and deceitful water. Oh! the glory of our party is gone! We shall have no more Strawberry Feasts; no more such meetings of rejoicing! Oh, my dear friend! ~~you should not have given me this~~ subject, and I should not have attempted to write on it.

March 30, 1830.

THE LAYING OF THE FOUNDATION STONE.

“Consider now, from this day and upward,—from the day that the foundation of the Lord’s temple was laid, consider it,—from this day will I bless you.—HAGGAI ii. part of the 18th. and 19th.”

IT is Easter, beautiful Easter. The time in all the year when nature’s types most clearly shadow forth the realities of the Christian dispensation. For the first butterfly has burst from its grave clothes, and is gone up toward heaven in the light of this season ; and look ! a thousand blossoms hang on branches that were to all appearance dead last week—nay ! that but a fortnight ago, (so changeful is our

climate) were bending beneath a heavy mass of snow; and see how the chesnut buds wrapped up as they were by God's own hand with "inimitable art," fold within fold, the blossoms carefully concealed between the delicate closed leaves, and those again covered in a substance softer than the finest wool, and then altogether sealed up in a "case russet and rude," but varnished with oderiferous gum. See! they have heard the voice of God in the garden in the cool of this day; now alas! man too often hears it not, but they have heard, and they burst their cerements and spring forth in beauty, exulting in the life He has renewed to them; and the primroses are up, round the foot of the old cross; and the daisies and cuckoo flowers are awake too, and rising out of their graves under every hedge, tell each other and man a tale of hope and the resurrection.

It has been altogether a fine Easter, from the time when the last storm drifted away

on Sunday morning, just as we set out for the distant church to which we were unexpectedly summoned. The sunshine burst through the clouds, and lit up many an east window, and shone on many a white linen vestment, and table cloth; and gleamed on many a plate and chalice, meetly arranged that day, for our church's highest festival; and streamed, like "faith touching all things with hues of heaven" on many a group of communicants, and on us, as we knelt on the grey stones worn by the worshippers of centuries; beneath one of which rudely sculptured with the figure of his staunch hound and his cross bow, rests the lasts forester of the king's wood. It was a pleasant Easter Sunday, for in the afternoon we worshipped again with those most dear to us, and in the place hallowed to us by thoughts of the living and of the dead; and the sun set brilliantly, and the following days were bright too, clear sunshine and fresh air; but in the middle of

the week it was not so fair ; and towards yesterday evening the old weather-cock, who I beg leave to observe in vindication of his character, which is generally much traduced ; unlike others who are carried about by every wind, he always faces the storm. The old weather-cock who is a particular friend of mine, for besides that we once had an interview on *terra firma*, when he came down to be gilded, he stands where he can always amuse me with his motions as I sit in my place at dinner. He, I observed yesterday, was gravely and gradually turning himself, to consider certain indications of rain in the south-west ; and I noticed them also, for they came between me and a scheme of pleasure which we had formed, and they gathered and darkened, and when night came, not a star was to be seen ; and when I rose this morning, the very day I had hoped to see so fresh and shining,—Oh ! how mild, and misty and quiet, and drizzling it was.

We were sorry, but the laying of a foundation stone for a new chapel within our own boundary, is a sight not to be seen every day ; and a sermon is to be preached in the old-fashioned gothic church at the most distant part of the forest, which we have never seen ; and if it would clear up, what a pleasant expedition it might be. And it did look likely enough to be clear at one time, and "it has ceased raining" we said, as we stood on the step at the front door. No, there are heavy drops falling still. Only from the eaves though, or from the old cherry boughs, as the blue titmouse, or the gay chaffinch springs from one spray to another, in search of the minute insects which nature has hidden there for their provision. Really, I do not think there will be much rain ; there is a light behind the dark fir trees, almost like sunshine ; we will take umbrellas and set out, white gowns and white stockings can be washed, luckily.

So I suppose the kind-hearted market women thought, as I crossed the green by the leaping stock, where they were resting with their baskets; for as I past and wished them good morning, one of them looked compassionately at my white clothes and then at the mud, and said civilly, "most a wonder you dont wear pattens, ma'am." But I am soon tired in pattens, and we were setting out for a very long walk, over many a stile, and up and down many a steep, and many a heavy ploughed field. Our path lay first down the lane to which I introduced my reader, when I told old Samuel's story; and the hedges are looking beautifully green now, and the primroses in the willow bed are in blossom, but we have no time to stay and look at them. We get over the first stile and straight across to the coal mines. O those great steam engines, how they disfigure our landscapes. What frightful volumes of smoke, and what an unnatural stream of

steaming water, and what a deafening noise! Oh! a tasteless man he must have been, who first polluted the green fields, and the fresh air, and the quiet of the country, with a steam engine. Never mind, we are past in safety, and the great boiler did not burst, though for the din it made, it seemed likely enough to do so. Now we have a different view before us. Through this little narrow lane, and here we are at the top of a steep field. A great variety of trees all along the bottom, mark the course of a little rill which is the northern division of our parish; as clear, as sparkling, decked with as fresh primroses, and hidden from the summer sun, by as green branches of ivy and eglantine, as when four hundred years ago, the stately herd of gallant wild deer came down by moonlight, to drink its chrystal water. Come on! there are no wild deer now, and we have a long way before us, up the hill and across the ploughed fields leading to the road.

It was very dirty, along what the people here call the black causeway, and my companion was fain to mount the wall, and walk along the top of it, to escape some of the mud ; and then as we were crossing a very wet and dirty gate, as carefully as we could, by, past a grand dowager in her chariot, and she, as well as her laced footmen, seemed much amused at our condition ; but they did not offer us a seat, so we travelled on. Two miles and more of very uninteresting road ; and yet perhaps it was so, as indeed, I believe upon consideration we shall find that most things are, only because we were ignorant. Every tree has wonders to show ; every cottage an history, often of deep and touching interest if we did but stop to inquire into it. There, perhaps, where we saw an old woman look up hastily from her labour, as a tall lad in a sailor's jacket, past—lives a mother, whose son is buried in the wide waters, and yet she trims the fire for him, and

keeps the place for him night after night, vainly expecting his return. In that neat cottage, which looks as if it had lately been repaired, lives, probably, a newly-married couple : in what order their little garden is, and what a beautiful blossom they have on their old pear tree.—Ah ! there is the pretty mistress of it, with her little infant in her arms. But come on ! dont let her see us looking at her ; she is pale, and looks very, very sad, and her clean cap has a close, deep mourning border. How very young she looks, poor thing can she be a widow already ? O, wherever a human dwelling is, there must be some feeling with which human hearts should be able to sympathise ; some tale to which a human ear should listen with deep attention.

But now we are come to a beautiful descent of the road. The sloping fields on our right, and the aged trees stretching over our heads, with all their lovely variety of budding foliage,—chesnut and lime,

scented poplar and lofty elm, green weeping willow and silver birch ; who can pass on and fail to admire them. And, hark ! up the soft wind comes another sound mingled with that of the rustling branches, —a merry peal of bells. Ignorant I am of other music, but I know how I love that sound. 'The time may come, as Keble says, when

"Strange to our ears the church bells of our home"—it may ; but I think I must be very deaf, or very mad, before that sound can lose its interest to me.

We were weary with our long walk, but our steps sprung more lightly as they moved to that music, and we soon came in sight of the flag floating round the low spire ; and then into the church-yard, which was thronged with people waiting for the expected procession. We took refuge out of the bustle in the quiet church, and had much pleasure in looking round

on the grey arches and the gothic windows. The one opposite my seat was quite hidden by mingling sprays of dark ivy, and the light, young leaves of a dwarf elder, which grew outside ; and I was glad to see the church, as all places dedicated to the worship of God should be, in good repair and neat order. Then came the procession, flags, and music ; the workmen looking very important with their blue cockades, and the school-boys displaying their "peeled willow wands," and all the paraphernalia usual on such grand occasions.

But we had no longer time for looking on. The service began to remind us that we were in the house, and before the face of "Almighty God our heavenly Father ;" and that our fellow-men were for a while to be forgotten ; that we were sinners who had pardon to crave,—work to do with Heaven, of importance to make us pause even in earth's noblest business. The first

lesson for the day was appropriately the twenty-ninth of the first of Chronicles, recording the cheerfulness with which Israel once gave for the erection of a temple to her God, when "the people rejoiced for that they offered willingly, and David the king also, rejoiced with great joy." Oh ! for such a spirit under a better dispensation than that of Moses. After the second lesson, according to the beautiful provision of the rubric, admonishing the people, that "it is most convenient for baptism to be administered, when the most number of people come together, for that the congregation may testify the receiving of the newly-baptised into the number of Christ's church ; and that every man present may be put in remembrance of his own profession made to God in his baptism ;" "the priest coming to the font, then filled with pure water, and the sponsors and the people with the children being ready,"—I saw to my great delight, that

there was to be a public baptism. All the services of our church are scriptural in their origin, and soothing and strengthening in their tendency. This is one of the most deep interest ; for they who have had the smoothest passage, must know something of the tossing waves of this troublesome world ; they who have seen least of the tempest, yet know that deep answereth to deep, “and lifteth up her hands on high;” and that there is safety only for those who have been received into the ark of Christ’s church. And listen ! we are commanded not to doubt, but earnestly to believe that He will favourably receive these present infants ; we do not,—the promise is made by one, who, for His part, will most surely keep and perform. So we looked on with thankful hearts, as the clear water glistened on the calm brow, and the cross was signed, and “the young soldiers duly sworn.” Blessed children ! to be laid so early in their kind Saviour’s arms. Blessed church !

that so faithfully brings them to Him. The country choristers, who from their number, and from my observing amongst them, certain grave faces which I have seen elsewhere, I think were strengthened by the assistance of all their musical brethren from the villages round, sung the one hundred and twenty second psalm beginning,

"O 'twas a joyful sound to hear
Our tribes devoutly say," &c.

in what appeared to my uninitiated ears, very good stile for a country band. A little allowance needs always be made for the strong accent, and the determined loudness of voice; for they think it beneath their dignity to sing low, but on this occasion, only a *little* allowance was necessary. "It *was* a joyful sound," and I enjoyed it. The sermon too,—and thanks to the neat matron who acted as pew-opener on the occasion, we were placed near the pulpit,

and so that we could hear well,—was one which I had better not attempt to describe, because I have here neither time, nor ability to say how scriptural and how appropriate it was. But we were so interested by it, and it so completely took up our attention, that not until it was quite over, we observed how the clouds had darkened, and the mist thickened, and was descending in a soft, steady rain.

“How very unfortunate!” said every body. The people who formed the procession, which was here to be joined by many clergymen and gentlemen, had more than a mile across the country to walk; and then it was so wet for the women and children in their best clothes, and the umbrellas, under every one of which two or three were crowded, soon got so completely wet, that they really did more harm than good. “How very unfortunate!” thought the smart lad promoted that day to carry one of the flags, as he looked first at one

hand, and then at the other, and saw to his dismay, that as the rain streamed down the blue flag staff, it had left a deep green on the palm and fingers of his smart new yellow gloves. How very unfortunate ! perhaps they were a "*gage d'amour*" from the dark-eyed servant maid who, though trembling for her gay best bonnet, as she heard one heavy drop plash down after another, yet stood waiting under the fourth of an umbrella to see the standards and the standard bearers. How very unfortunate ! thought the trim gentlemen from the city, who had come in carriages to church, and were now obliged to walk two and two, through the middle of the mud,—country mud, of which some of them had little idea. "It will be long enough before you find any of them walking in a Kingswood procession again, I should think ;" and yet that is not the case, there is many an one there of whom I have reason to know well, if there was any duty

to be done, one good work to forward, or one friend to serve, they would willingly submit to more inconvenience than to-day's, and come through heavier roads than these to do it.

You will think that considering how far we were from home, we must have thought it rather unfortunate also. But I know not how it is, my parties of pleasure always turn out well. In this unkind world, it has always been my lot hitherto, to meet with kindness; and so, during all the rain that day, I found myself comfortably seated in a carriage, amongst strangers, yet treated almost as a friend. My companion had joined the procession, which, as it came through the trees, and across the ground to the appointed spot, really looked extremely pretty; and when the rain past off, which it did presently, wanted nothing but a gleam of sunshine to make it a most glad and joyous spectacle. But that gleam, I must confess, was wanted.

The red cross flags streamed out, and the gorgeous lions ramped in gold; and the lion and the unicorn in their bower of rose, shamrock, and thistle, quarrelled for the king's shield, and held up their gilded fists at each other, and grinned, and showed their golden teeth, as usual; but the sun disdained to look at them; however, we did very well without him.

I do not understand exactly the mechanism employed on these occasions, it is very simple, I believe; but the crowd is at such times so great, that one cannot expect then, to take a lesson on the powers of the lever and pulley; but I saw the little glass in which were enclosed the coins of the present reign, and the names of the principal persons concerned, and I looked at it, wondering who shall see them next. When the temple about to be erected shall have fallen at length by slow decay, and the plough of the husbandman, forgetful that it ever stood there, shall find itself

impeded by the mouldering foundation; these coins, perhaps, as those of the Roman emperors have sometimes been, may again be cast forth to light. Who shall decipher then, their image and superscription? Will the truth of God, and his ordinances be then continued to our country; or will God before that time, being "weary of a race like ours," have removed the candlestick out of its place? Who can tell? And this great multitude, one eye after another shall be closed in death; one voice after another shall be hushed, and every one be quiet in his grave; and the little children who were brought to lay their hands on the stone, that they might tell their sons, and their sons' sons that they had done so; they, and all their generations shall have past away, and their names shall be forgotten. O changeable world! what an unspeakable blessing is that gospel which lifts our hopes and our hearts above thee.—As soon as the company had established themselves on the

platform, and quiet could be obtained ; the hymn, the words of which were beautiful, and which sounded very sweetly in the open air, rose ; and the voice of prayer was heard, entreating God's blessing for his Son's sake, on the work begun, and his presence in his temple, when it should be accomplished. The stone descended to its place, and when the money which was collected toward defraying the expenses of the intended building was laid on it to be counted ; the band was desired to play the national air : but a valued friend of ours, very characteristically requested them "to praise God first, and the king afterwards ;" so in a moment, many voices joined in the old doxology,

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,"—

and the sweet and well-known music rose clearly on the soft fresh wind. Nothing remained, but to "bless God and to take courage." As the company began slowly

to disperse, the band struck up the air, without which a loyal English assembly, met together for a good purpose, never ought to separate ; and even in times like these, we felt our pulses quicken to the words, "God save the king."

The workmen then joined the procession, to return to a dinner which was provided for them ; and the gentlemen who had come from a distance, returned also for the same purpose ; and we, as soon as we could find each other, set forth on our pilgrimage home. Happily, we had no more rain, so that our journey was—to me it could not be otherwise—very pleasant ; and we compared notes of our adventures during the short time we had been parted ; admired the words of the hymn ; and joined in hoping that as the foundation has been laid in prayer, the top-stone may, ere any very long time, be put on with shouting.

April 17, 1830.

THE VESTRY.

———"Thank the God who placed thy state
Above the lowly, but beneath the great ;
And still his name with gratitude revere,
Who blest the Sabbath of thy leisure here."

REV. W. L. BOWLES.

THERE are few places that I like better than our little Vestry Room, perhaps because there are few with which I am so well acquainted. Certainly, it has not antiquity to make it interesting ; no particular beauty of proportion, nor architectural ornament ; and excepting the Oxford Almanacks, which are preserved year after year for the sake of their prints, no embellishments of any kind. Yet to my eye, it has many beauties, and to my heart many

interesting associations. Come with me, a country parson's daughter, of course, has a right to the key, and we will go in there together. The oaken floor is clean, and sanded; and the walls and ceiling neatly white-washed. The little fire-place is built of freestone; and displays round the grate, scripture stories painted in a blue colour on Dutch tiles, in a manner more calculated to excite a smile, than, I hope, the artist intended; and as the season for fire is past, our sexton very tastily decorates the hearth with long sprays of sweet briar, and budding lilac fresh every Sunday morning through the summer. The old oak table also, whose surface is so unpolished, and marked with so many ink stains; (you cannot think how much it looks like king Arthur's, when it is unfolded to the full amplitude of its dimensions, and drawn into the middle of the room;) and then too, we can take its place in the south window, and look on the fair extent

of prospect; and on a sunny April morning, I much doubt whether it is possible to find a more soothing scene, than the one before us. More glorious landscapes there may be. Riven rocks, and lofty Alps; unfathomed, and mighty waters to speak of the power and majesty of God; or glittering towers, and gorgeous palaces to tell of the pride of man. But this tranquil scenery breathes only of the love and mercy of its Creator; and is therefore in better keeping with the spot immediately before us,—the quiet church-yard where the Christian is laid to rest, his face looking toward the east, as watching till the light come. For the soft, green fields that join the burial place, are full of wild flowers, which though they cry, as of old time, "All flesh is grass!" add also, "Awake and sing ye that sleep in dust!" It is a lovely prospect; look over the white gate at the end of the avenue; the woods on the other side of the river are tinted with all the hues which

spring employs ; almost equalling her sister Autumn, in variety, and far exceeding her in freshness. The pear trees, even at this distance, are very evident ; shining as the shadow of a cloud passes from them, like a fall of snow. The green hills rise softly one above another, each crested by its varied copse-wood ; until where the most distant is traced on the horizon, we lose the dim line against the pale, blue sky. Beautiful scenery ! we know that earth's flowers are fading ; that her blossoms fall, and that clouds dim her sunshine, and yet we cannot look on such a view without being thankful, that pilgrims, wayworn pilgrims, as we oftentimes feel ourselves to be, we are permitted to pass through so fair a world as this, on our way, we humbly trust, to one which has never fallen from its first, high estate ; never been cursed for the sin of its inhabitant.

But this is distant scenery ; look through the arched door toward the east. Our

garden door,—I am sorry to tell you, that once we had a low, white hatch, looking much more countryfied than that ; but the boys used to get over it to steal our apples. I really am ashamed of the lawless manners of my countrymen ;—and we were obliged to substitute that close door ; but I left it open as we came in, that I might show you the home view. Look up the narrow, winding walk, leading under the blossoming apple trees ; and by the white rose bush, into the paved court, at the back of the house. There are a variety of rose bushes, honey-suckles, and laurustinus covering the low wall which runs round that pavement ; and at the higher end, grows a huge bush of berried ivy, which shall not be cut, because the blackbird, whose nest is in the hawthorn hedge at the bottom of the garden, is so tame as to come there for food, all through the winter, and late in the spring. Indeed, last winter was so very severe, that the birds

eat the very buds of the laurustinus flowers. Against that side of the house, is a large and in summer, a most luxuriant jessamine; under the wall is a narrow border of common flowers; primroses grow very well there, and the iris with its long rushy leaves, and polyanthuses which love the shade; and there also grows a wild flower, which was found once during a summer evening's ramble, and brought home, and planted there as a pledge of true love. I well remember the night; the friends, he who planted it, and she who held the lantern for him, whilst it was being planted, are far away now; but the little flower springs up every year to remind us of them. Carry your eye across to the left, up the green slope, to the noble variegated holly, and the two sycamores; round whose honied blossoms, the bees and butterflies revel by day, and the cockchafers and moths swarm at night: and admire, you cannot help admiring, the singular

beauty of the pensile birch tree, which towers above a laburnum and mountain-ash, whose streaming yellow wreaths, and whose scented white flowers are just ready to disclose themselves. Beyond that group of trees, is a straight walk, most pleasant on a May evening, when the white lilies stand there in their unblemished beauty, reminding one, as they spread their pure and gleaming blossoms in the twilight, of the angel forms,—could they be freer from earth's stain,—that shone once in a sepulchre.

Ah ! there passes on its glittering wings, a swallow, and another, and another, sweeping by, and glancing to and fro, like lightning. Beautiful ! wonderful creatures ! whence do they come ? and how do they so clearly understand the exact time of their return ? What unseen hand traces a path for them, through the trackless air ? Ah ! this is one of nature's secrets ; kind she is, and gentle ; amply rewarding her

faithful admirers, with here and there an explanation of some word or line of her wonderful book ; but on one broad page after another, though it lies for ever open before us, we “only cast a wishful look.” Well, no matter if the God of nature will but reveal *himself* to us ; we can thankfully wait until we reach another world, for an explanation of his miracles in this. So I thought in verse ; will the lines give you any amusement, my gentle reader ? Here they are :—

A watcher I, by bush and stream,
 A loiterer by the field and fold ;
 A lover of tradition's dream,
 And peasant tales of days of old.

A gazer on each flower that springs,
 And bud that grows on heath, and wild :
 A questioner of hidden things,
 Nature's unwise, but loving child.

A follower of the bee and bird,
 As to their secret homes they hie ;

A listener when the voice is heard,
That wakes the shrouded butterfly.

God of the wonders that I love,
Let me each day know more of Thee ;
Till in Thine unfallen world above,
Through no dark glass Thy face I see.

Give unto one, who nothing knows,
Through this dim earth Thy steps to trace.
Thy might, O Lord, each atom shows,
And every flower displays Thy grace.

If nought I know, Thy wisdom more,
May, through Thy grace, beam forth in me ;
Sun ! shine, whilst I the page explore,
Of Thine own nature's mystery.

But our little vestry has yet another view. Open the opposite door gently ; it leads into the church, by the chancel. We have, you see, no altar piece ; but the broad uncoloured window is pleasantly shadowed by the thick leaves of the tree, which from the outside conceals it entirely, " casting a dim, religious light ;" not ex

actly such an one as Milton intended, yet no less suitable to the place, I think, nor to the feelings of the worshippers. The morning sun is shining on the white stone which covers little Mary's grave ; and on the marble monument above it. What a quiet scene ! No stir of human life ; nothing heard, but the clear song of the bird, whose nest, I suppose, is amongst those rustling branches ; his note is so like the nightingale's, that if we were not aware of the deception, we might mistake it. But we have seen the silvery grey of the shining wings, and the velvet black head, and know the stranger,* for he arrived only last month very well. He has flown away, and it is deeply silent ; and when we speak, echo returns to us, as if fearful of disturbing so solemn a spot. Oh ! what thronging thoughts come into our minds,

"All round us memory, at our feet the proof
How deep the grave holds all we treasure here."

* *Motacilla Atricapilla*.—Black Cap.

Yes, and what comfort there is, in thinking of those who have knelt at that holiest place with us, in faith and hope.

Truly it is a meeting of but short duration; and we rise and part, and some never return again. Blind Samuel's kinsman led him, as for many years he had been accustomed to do, up to the place, where they knelt side by side at the altar rails, on the Sunday before the old man laid down on his bed to die; and in three weeks after he was buried, his aged kinsman was laid in his grave too. But thank God! I have seen the young come there also; in all the vigour of health, in the morning of what seemed likely to be a long, glorious day. I have seen young hands stretched forth to receive the cup of blessing, and bright heads bent in prayer; thank God! I have seen it. And what if the eye that hath seen, sees it no more? Then, the next time we come, we bless God for all His servants departed this life, in His faith and

fear ; and we press on, in sure and certain hope.

But I am never in this vestry, without thinking of two ladies, whom I once saw here : the younger of whom was come to return thanks for her recovery after her confinement. I remember looking at them, as they stood by the little fire-place, when we past through from church. They were two very lovely women,—a mother and daughter : the elder one had been, as I have heard from those who knew her in her youth, remarkable as well for her vivacity and intelligence, as for her singular beauty ; and even then, though she had known perils by land and by water, for she had crossed the Atlantic three times ; and though she had been early left a widow with a young family, her cheerfulness and easy manners, still added much to the grace of her person.

Her daughter was extremely like her, yet more like Dominichino's St. Cecilia.

The eyes as large, and dark, and bright, were shaded and softened by just such long silken eye lashes ; her cheek was, that day at least, as purely pale. I never saw the painting, only a print from it ; but Dominichino would not, I should think give his St. Cecilia much colour ;—a dweller on earth, listening to the harmony of heaven ; ecstasy might be expressed in the lifted eyes and the parted lips ; and inspiration too powerful for the weak earth-born frame, and she would be pale. And Mary, Oh ! who could look at her that day, and wonder if the bloom of her youth was gone ! Yet you will think it was a joyous occasion. Her infant—and a lovelier was never laid in its mother's arms,—grew and improved daily ; and her health, though she had been very, very ill, was nearly restored to her : yet no wonder her lip quivered, when kind friends addressed her ; no wonder her eyes were dim with weeping ; she might well be pale.

Her husband, to whom she had been married in a distant part of the globe, and to whom she was much attached, had brought her here, a few months since, to place her under her mother's care, at the critical period when such care is most needed. During the preceding years, since her marriage, her kind sisters had more than once provided for her,—as sisters love well to provide; and we had been shown the delicately wrought robes, which were to be sent so far, as tokens of love to one so very dear. Time after time, however, we had been told, that their care had proved unavailing; the child so fondly expected, was dead. But at this time, her husband's business called him to England, and Mary gladly accompanied him. Her mother and sisters looked forward with unmixed delight, to receiving her. She came: I remember the first time I saw her, on a clear winter day; the fresh wind had given her a bright colour; health, and hope, and

youth shone in her clear eyes, and spoke in her cheerful tone. The delight of visiting her family, after so long a separation, was no doubt very great; and then also, what a pleasure it must have been to her, to introduce to her old friends,—for she was a native of our parish,—such a man as her husband; so lively, so intelligent, possessed of such a fund of information, and such a talent for conversation. Every one valued his acquaintance, and was sorry that he was only a visitor. Time past on, and it was necessary for him to make a journey into the north: it was business which could not be delayed; and though he felt unwilling to leave his wife just then, yet he did leave her. Her health and spirits were good, and her mother's care, and her sister's attention unwearied. His journey was to be but short, and they parted cheerfully. Only two or three days, and the long desired child was born; and Mary's first thought, as she

looked on it, was, "Oh, the delight of showing her to her father!" Her strength returned rapidly, and her infant gave more than usual promise of health and beauty. "Dress her in her best robe and cap, to-day," she said one morning to her nurse, "for I am sure her father will come." But he came not. "Should not you think he must certainly be here soon, mother?" she asked the next morning, and the next; but her mother sometimes was silent, as if she did not hear; and at others, answered her anxious question in some vague and indefinite manner. At length, she insisted on writing to her husband. It was in vain that her sisters told her she was too weak, in vain that though she had scarcely strength to guide her pen, she yet struggled with her feelings, and with a trembling hand inscribed one line after another, expressive of deep affection; that letter was never to be sent; she was a widow. News of her husband's

sudden death had reached her family, but they kept it from her as long as possible ; and whilst she wondered at the length of his journey, they knew that he was still in his grave ; and when she chose the delicate colour of the dress, in which, when her husband came home, she intended to appear at church with her infant, as one arrayed for a festival of joy and thanksgiving,—they were secretly getting their mourning ready, and preparing for her that deepest of all mourning—a widow's weeds. There are scenes on which a stranger's eye may not look. I know not who told her the news, nor in what manner she received it ; whether with the “great, and exceeding bitter cry” of agonized feeling, or the silence of a despair too deep for tears : but I know how she must have doubted the reality of the tidings. How impossible she must, for a long time, have found it, to separate the thought of her child, from the intention

of showing it to its father; from what a dream of hope she awakened, and what a blank this busy world must have been to her; and then too, how her dreams, when at last she slept, were filled with the strange and distorted representations of the same images which distressed her mind by day; and how sometimes in her sleep, she fancied him alive and conversing with her, and yet even then, knew that she must awake to find sorrow the only reality, and happiness a dream. But her frame, as might be supposed, sunk under the trial. She had a very long and alarming illness, so that although her child was born early in spring, it was, I believe, verging toward the close of summer, when we met her here in the vestry in her new mourning. Oh! no wonder that her cheek was pale, and her eye dim with weeping; or that notwithstanding the long weeks of illness she had experienced, she answered the inquiries of friends by saying, that she

"knew of no pain now, but the heart-ache!"

But you will connect the idea of our vestry, with none but gloomy associations, I am afraid. You would not have done so, if you could have run down with me the other morning, to desire our sexton's wife, to fetch some green boughs for the grate, though it was not Sunday; and to place on the old table, a basket of tulips, lilies of the valley, scarlet anemone, and sweet briar. You would not have thought so, if you had stood with me in the gallery, as the gay bridal train past up the aisle into it. It has been many a long day, indeed, since it was graced by so joyous a party.

It was a bright sunny morning, and I was glad, for says the old line,

"Happy is the bride that the sun shines on;"

and the white dresses of the bride and bridesmaids: (I admire the taste which pre-

scribes white as the wedding dress ; it seems to me one of the few occasions to which white is suitable :

“Dust will soil, and thorns will tear,
Is it fit for this world's wear ?”)

The white robes, by turns, looked either like snow or sunshine, as they waved under the changeful shade of the trees. I scarcely ever saw a prettier sight ; nor it appeared to me,—as I looked at the faithful, young couple, and thought of all the troubles they may have to struggle with together ; the changes and chances of this mortal life, which they must see ; sickness or health, riches or poverty, good or evil,—one more interesting. May the God of Isaac and Rebekah keep them ! I believe the solemn voice which pronounced the prescribed blessing, as they knelt hand in hand at the altar, was responded by many a heart ; I am sure it was by mine. Have I not introduced you to them before, my

dear reader, and have you not before heard me wish them joy?

But who are these grave and consequential personages coming up the avenue; and why has Martha been so long dusting the table, and setting the chairs in order? She is too civil to say so, but I believe she is marvelling, in her own mind, why I stay here, and half wishes me out of the way. And her father, the sexton, himself has peeped in two or three times, to see how things stand; and casts a half glance of wonder at me: he can drive away the boys, and the school children who trouble him; but I suppose he considers me beyond his jurisdiction; for though he evidently thinks me out of my place, he says nothing; though he appears exactly, in what people call a fidget. But there comes the clerk, in something between his Sunday and his working-day dress; and he and I being on terms of greater intimacy, he presently gives me to understand

very politely, that my absence is requested; that there is going to be a parish meeting, and the gentlemen of the Vestry are even now in the church-yard.

Oh! I beg their pardon, I am sure, I would not hinder their important business a moment. One look round the little vestry. I wish they may admire it, as much as I do; and that its quiet may never be disturbed by noisy debate; and that their recollections of this place may be as pleasant and peaceable as mine have been.

April 30, 1830.

WHIT-MONDAY.

How oft, when Memory's pensive eyes
Gaze down the vale of years,
Must sorrow's clouding mists arise ;
How oft, descend in tears.

“**W**HAT a morning!” I said to myself, as the first sound I heard, was the pattering rain against my shaking casement ; and the heavy drops danced, and bubbled on the leads at the top of the house, and ran in a noisy stream through the gutter, into the shoot which crosses my little attic. “What a sad morning for Whit-Monday ; the school children will not be able to walk, that’s certain ; and the young visitors whom we expected to join the festivities of to-day, how they will all be disappointed !” I did not own how much

I should be so myself, but as I sat looking at the heavy grey clouds, I began to think of Whit-Mondays in general ; and of one or two that I recollected in particular.

I thought of the pleasure the words conveyed to us, when we were children ; with what delight we looked forward to it for weeks together, when the clubs were in prosperity ; and used to parade with flags and drums through the parish, to the number of four or five. How very handsome we thought the orange and blue, and spangled cockades in the men's hats ; and how we admired the huge nosegays, pionies and double stocks, which most of them displayed at their button holes ; and how we ran from one window to another, from the front door to the slope, and from the slope to the church-yard, as the sound of the music told us, that the procession was on its way down the road, and toward the church. Since that time, however, most of the clubs have broken up, and of

the two,—I believe there are only two remaining,—the one finds the public exhibition of itself, too expensive; and for the other,—O tempora! O mores!—the church service is too long, so we see nothing of them; and if it were not for the school children, Whit-Monday would pass to us, as quietly as all the other Mondays in the year.

From the time our school-room was built,—1785 says the date on the front,—it has been the custom for the children to walk with the master and mistress round a part of the parish, to be back in time to attend divine service at church; and after singing a hymn in the vicarage garden, to receive a cake each, as they pass under the sycamore trees into the road, and are dismissed for their three days' holiday. Now the meeting of all the children in their best clothes, and in high spirits, so early in the morning, is really a pleasant sight; the sound of their singing very

sweet,—(Ah! I am not afraid to say so now: we have been told this very day, by the only person capable of judging,—for he has been to hear them all,—that our school sings better than any in the neighbourhood; there's an unexpected triumph for us!) and their shout at setting out very joyous.

And then there are children of another class.—Are there not little William and Edward? to whom we can give pleasure, by asking them for that day; young acquaintance to whom living all the year in the city, the happiness of one long summer day in the green country is very great. Are you curious to see the style of our invitation cards? It ran something like this:—

AN INVITATION FOR WHIT-MONDAY.

Come ye, come ye, from town and tower,
The feast is spread in our sylvan bower;
The chesnut sconces are lighted on high,
And her new robes waveth the butterfly,


And fair are her holiday robes to see,
Wrought in their velvet embroidery ;
And the heart's-ease blossoms are shining in mirth,
On the glittering hour of the rose's birth ;
And our woodland choristers wake a song,
That unpaid, they shall warble the whole day long.
And, Oh, the soft and the dewy glade
Is varied by long streams of light and shade ;
By turns, 'tis all sunlight, then shadow all,
As the wind bids the branches arise or fall.
'Tis now all a scene for calm and sweet
Deep musing ; then glitter for light hearts meet ;
Still mid such changes our joys must be,
To our varying bower, O hasten ye !
The gueldre rose, hath her white globes filled
With nectar, from sunshine and dew distilled ;
And bright wreaths wave from laburnum's bough,
Which the next wind may scatter.—Come now !

Come now !

Oh, haste ye now ! for although they are bright,
Laughing and dancing in sunshine light ;
Though the dew is pure, and the flowers are gay,
A garland, how meet for the brow of May !
Ye know how the fairest buds bloom to die ;
O'er the youngest flowers how the frost winds sigh,
Though the sun shines at rising, in giant might,
Ye know how he sinks in the wave at night !

Yet come ye, come ! for around our cell,
Hope whispers from every hyacinth-bell ;
And even in fading their message give,
“ We wait for our rising, from death we live ! ”
And the beams that fade through our chesnut bow-
Closing the eyes of their thousand flowers, [ers,
Leave on our hearts no trace of sorrow,
For they tell of a glorious rising to-morrow ;
And to us, o'er the graves of earth's fairest things,
Sure hopes are waving their sunny wings.
Have ye known grief in this world of sadness ?
Come ! we have balm in our bower of gladness ;
Haste from your labours in tower and town,
From your chambers of study,—Oh, hasten down.
From lofty roof, and from crowded hall,
Come at the spell of our charmed call !
For the feast is spread in our sylvan bower,
Come ye ! Oh, come ye ! from town and tower.

“ No great inducement for them in our wet garden, to-day,” I thought again ; it will be just such weather, as it was on this day two or three years ago, when I remember I saw some of the school girls, startled by the first drop of rain, as they were loitering down the road ; but though



they put their handkerchiefs over their heads, and ran for it, the storm came on so fast, that many a new ribbon was stained, and many a best bonnet was damaged, before they got into the school ; and there, poor things, they sat, one disappointed and gloomy comrade after another, coming in with dripping clothes ; for they would not give up the hope and chance of going, till, at last, at ten o'clock, having waited nearly three weary hours, in the vain hope of drier weather, the master came in despair to order them all home.

It was in vain, that the maker of the great flag, had worked to get it ready, so diligently. The red and white cross was inserted in its place on the deep blue ground ; and the last letter of the motto, wrought in white wool, "Fear God and the king" was filled up, and the initials and the date were there ; but the flag belied the private motto of the worker, which was marked in small letters, in the middle

of the cross, "Through all weathers," on this the first day of its completion. Oh! that was a gloomy day. How one heavy storm gathered and poured down, before the other was over; and to-day, I said, will be just like that. How different from that bright sunny morning, which had been so long expected; and which came yet brighter and more sunny, than our expectations promised it should be. How pleasant the lanes looked with their wild geranium and blue veronica, and hawthorn, as we returned home through them; and though there was, I remember, a slight shower at noon, how sweetly it cleared off toward evening, and

"The yellow light stream'd from the western heaven"

through the damp branches, making every dewy green leaf shine with the light of a glow-worm; and shooting its long level rays through the ivy that hung in festoons round the trunks of the old trees, and

smiling on the low blue flowers, that creep down to the very edge of the quiet stream, to look at themselves in the silver mirror. Ah ! that was a pleasant day, and a pleasant walk ; and yet then, I do not think, I enjoyed it half as much as I might have done : I really believe there is a time in some people's lives, when they think it wise to be melancholy ; perhaps, trouble is generally necessary to teach us, that it is the part of real wisdom thankfully to receive and enjoy present blessings. It may sound very sentimental to say, as I well remember I did on that pleasant day,

"I can ne'er behold the summer blue,
But I look sadly for the dark clouds too ;
Or see the bright wreath's glow beneath June's sky,
But my first thought is,—they are come to die."

But in indulging such a frame of mind, must we not plead guilty to St. Paul's accusation of the heathen of old, "Neither were thankful." Let us desire now, in


whatsoever state we are, to be therewith content ; to bear patiently storms and clouds when they do come ; but to bless God, and rejoice in the sunshine.

“ Really,” I said, as I looked up when I finished the last sentence, “ it is not raining now ;” and I rose up quickly, “ they will surely set off without me.” So I ran down stairs in as much haste, as if some very important consequence was to be the result of my speed ; and I looked into one room after another, but the unoccupied chairs, and the unopened work-boxes, and desks were all in their respective places ; my companions were gone on, and nothing was left, but for me to follow. How often, in this busy world, one may muse away half the time, in which the active set about their work and do it.

I found it very muddy in the road, and although it did not actually rain, the willow trees which, to our sorrow, were so much cut up in the spring, because they

incommoded the travellers on the top of the mail, the only genteel conveyance which stately passes this ungenteel road, —were still dripping from every leaf, as I past down. Yet damp and gloomy as it was, when I entered the school, (newly white-washed and painted for the occasion,) I found it nearly full. All the girls had arranged themselves in their separate classes; and were too happy, in too good temper, not to be well behaved. One group was standing every foot, in exactly its proper place, round the newly-chalked half circle; every hand lifted into precisely the same position; and every tongue gravely repeating the same hymn. Another class, in nearly as great order, stood quietly listening; and a third, at the further end of the room, were sitting in a long row, opposite the door, probably tired of being still, and longing for the signal to move. It was given, and we all went into the boy's room; and though it

appeared to me, that I saw something more than usual of the distress of the times, in the bare feet, and scanty and shabby clothes of some, both girls and boys; yet altogether it was a pleasant and interesting sight: at least, our little visitors, who were there waiting for us, looked as if they thought so. The children knelt down, to the number of two hundred and sixty; and the loved voice, which offered up the simple and impressive prayer for them,—God grant that it may long be heard amongst them, was disturbed by no sound; all were attentive and still. No sound, did I say? Oh! there was a dear little one present, too young to know what prayer means; though many a prayer is daily offered up for her, and her voice was heard when the other voices were hushed, and her little foot moved up and down the long lines of quiet children, when every other foot was still. They rose up and sung, and the little creature sung too for



joy; and the boys shouted as they stood in their order of procession, bearing their blue sticks, and their "streamers long and gay," and the baby waved her hands and shouted too in the excess of her delight.. .

———"It is a very pleasant sight," said dear nurse, as she stood by me watching the many coloured train, as it wound down the road; "yes," I turned round to answer her; but the remembrance of past days, and of her long past, but unforgotten service, came associated with her form to my mind; and I thought "it is indeed pleasant to see you." Her delicately-white mob cap, her neat black satin bonnet, and her dark chintz gown, each and every article of her dress was in exact keeping with her station in society; she looked like a young clergyman's foster-mother. The frill which she had on,—she never wore any thing so gay before,—was worked for her, by her other foster-child, and new yesterday, when, for the first time, she

came to hear her son preach. What a pleasure it must have been to her ; and what a pleasure it was to me to walk round the garden with her afterwards, and listen to the interesting story, which I have often heard, and yet always hear with fresh interest. “ I could not help recollecting,” she said, “ when I saw him stand up in his pulpit, the first time I ever saw him ; what a dying thing he looked then, poor dear !” and she went on to tell me how sorry she was, that she had been sent for, to nurse him, because she felt sure he must die. How her heart ached to hear his cries, which weak as they were, yet seemed as if they would end only in the silence of death ; and then, having watched by him for many days, and he appeared somewhat the better for her care ; and as she could nurse him only on condition of taking him to her own fire-side, because her family much needed her presence, she carried him to her cottage,

in the comb under the high hill, stopping many times by the way, to listen to his almost imperceptible breathing, and more than once doubting whether she held a living, or a dead infant to her bosom. But the God of the child Moses—blessed be His holy name!—watched over the little sickly one. His foster-mother's care was day by day rewarded with some token of improvement. "Yet," said she, as she concluded her story, "I never thought he would live to preach, or I to hearken to him." Surely the duty enjoined in the fifth commandment, extends to such a person as this. I confess I have sometimes been astonished, that young people, in general, do not show more affection to their nurses. In early times, we know they were considered persons of great consequence; and I should think, in proportion as the kindly affections are allowed to exert their natural influence, and we keep out of the chilling atmosphere of a

selfish world, the more tender and faithful nurses will be ; and the more grateful and affectionate their children. It is a pity, that in a day which professes to be one of so much improvement ; masters and servants should appear to understand less than they used to do, of their respective duties ; such, from the complaints we hear on every side, seems, at least, to be the case : but let us all look well to ourselves ; the Abrahams of society, I believe, will most often be blest with Eliezers ; and it is Philemon's runaway servant, who will most frequently become the penitent Onisephorus.

Eleven, was the hour appointed for service, and the children were all quietly in their places before that time. There were quite as many of the parents present, as I expected to see ; and I trust the service of the day, and the very faithful and affectionate sermon, to which they afterwards listened, had its due effect on them : it

appeared so, certainly, for many a tear was shed, and the manner and the countenances of many evinced deep attention. There was simple Isaac, who for that day, laid aside his black working dress; and arrayed in his Sunday suit, with a sprig of thyme, and two or three double daisies in his button-hole,—looked really as clean from head to foot, as if he had never seen the inside of a coalpit in his life. He has a pale, mild face; with rather handsome, but singularly inexpressive features, and sometimes, when he has attempted to do errands for us,—to be sure, that is quite out of his line,—we have had reason to think his intellect none of the brightest: but never mind, Isaac! “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;” and the attention and interest with which you heard, to-day, of him who “shall feed his flock like a shepherd, and gather the lambs with his arm,” proved plainly that the mysteries of religion may be revealed,

and the poetry of the gospel felt by the illiterate and the simple.

But there is no want of expression in the countenance of the old man; who sits at the top of the aisle. I observed him when first I came into church: his face was turned toward the children, his hands were lifted up, and his eyes closed. You saw at a glance that his whole heart was engaged; he was praying for them. One tear after another streamed quietly down the thin cheek, but God's peace which passeth all understanding, shone on the placid brow. The exhortation began, and the expression of his features altered, with every alteration in the touching service: there was still attention, deep humiliation, exulting hope; and then again the children sung, and again the old man wept and prayed for them. Our service has, with him, its full value; for by the help of his large, old-fashioned prayer book, he keeps word by word with the minister through-

out it. But the preacher may be eloquent or pathetic, it is all lost upon him; he does not know the words beforehand, and he never hears one syllable of the sermon. He hands his bible over our pew door, that we may find him the text; and he likes well, he says, to meditate on it; but he has entirely lost his hearing for many years:—

“But patience! there may come a time,
When these dull ears shall scan aright,
Strains, that outring earth’s drowsy chime,
As heaven outshines the taper’s light.”—KEBLE.



Happy, good, old man; one would think it must be only a short time, before that world of brightness, and that burst of music shall break upon him. He has been an aged man as long as I can recollect; and the thought of him comes to my mind, connected with some affecting remembrances. I never can look at him now, without thinking of one day in particular, when a beautiful little boy was brought into the church, before the con-

gregation assembled, on purpose that good old John might see him. The child raised his dark wondering eyes to the old man's face ; as taking one little delicate hand in his, he laid his other on the clustering curls of shining hair, and prayed " the God that had fed him all his life long,—the Angel that had redeemed him from all evil, to bless the lad !" And surely, there the blessing rested : the child grew : how green an olive tree in the house of his God ; why should I pause now to tell you. I saw that old man lift up his eyes in prayer for him, when, thirteen years after, he knelt for the first time, to receive the emblems of his Saviour's redeeming love : again, the holy feast was spread ; and again came the aged man and the youth. A few weeks,—a very few past, the old man knelt at his Lord's table, in his accustomed place ; but as he came, he had paused, to look upon that light-hearted boy's grave.

Hark ! there is a shout of joy from our garden ; there is the bounding of glad steps, and the song of rejoicing hearts. I cannot go amongst them now. Come quietly away with me ; and we will walk up and down the narrow path, by the sweet briar hedge ; and we will listen to the low song of the blackbird, and the fresh air will cool our aching brows, and we shall find comfort. To these things, fresh air, and the birds' song, and the fragrance of the lowly flowers, God has given a blessing ; like sleep, they are his medicines,—“ Balm of hurt minds.” We will walk to and fro, under the shade of these elms, and we will be calm ; bitter recollections shall be made sweet, by the thought of his mercies ; and in the midst of the sorrows we have in our hearts, his comforts shall refresh our souls ; and our minds shall be stored with many pleasant thoughts, sweet, like the perfume of these flowers ;

“ Like the memory of well-spent time
Of things that are holy and dear ;
Of friends departed this life,
In the Lord's faith and fear.”

And so shall end our Whit-Monday : and it is well for us, that our very days of rejoicing should end even so ; with a sigh for that land, where joy is in its own country ; where there is no more sorrow, nor any more crying, because God wipes away the tears from all eyes.



A DAY OF GLOOM.

“Although the day be never so long,
At last, it ringeth to evensong!”

THERE are days in our lives in which without any visible reason why it should be so, the tide of our spirit sinks far below its usual level: all our evils real, or fancied, swarm about us at once, and we fully assent to the divinely-inspired sentence, which says, “Man is born to trouble.”

It is not at all necessary to feel the pushing, and thronging of a rude world, to know how many inconveniences are found in life. If his fellows do not vex him, “man disquieteth himself;” yet, “What should you know of the trouble and misery

of the world, in this retirement," has been often said to me; but it has been vainly said; "the whole creation groaneth," and the groan is heard as deeply in the shade of the forest, as in the heart of the city.

Now it happened, that I sat down to write, on one of these—the spirit's *ember* days. I had been wearied with the sound of the melancholy bell, which had been tolling muffled all day;* and as night came on, and the lowered flags drooping heavily from the distant towers, could no more be distinguished, and the minute guns fired hour after hour, in answer to the deep knell; I became very gloomy indeed, and I lay awake listening; and when at last I slept, the solemn sounds mingled with my dreams. I thought, as I suppose most other people in the kingdom did that night, of the worthlessness of earth's treasure, and the changeableness of earth's

* This chapter was begun about the time of the late king's funeral.

certainty; and the impression continued strongly on my mind many days. The pomp and circumstance of the procession was different, certainly, I thought; there was the monarch of a mighty land himself, and nobles and princes as mourners; and banners and escutcheons, to show how mighty he had been, whom the purple pall covered; and partially displayed in the torch-light, were the white robes of priests, and the reversed arms of soldiers: but now the royal corpse is left, as valueless a thing, as unattended, in as deep gloom, as that of the peasant child; which half a dozen country girls, and its sorrowing father and mother, laid to rest, on that same stormy evening in our bleak churchyard.

O Lord! in thy sight, what is man, with all his pomp and pageantry? What are we? Altogether vanity. A high estate cannot defend, a low estate cannot shelter us from the hand of death; any more than

from the miseries of life. And then,—for it was a day of gloom—I went on to consider how fully it had been my lot to know what that word misery means. Nay, my gentle reader, do not smile so incredulously. One need not be grey-headed ; one need not have accompanied Howard to Turkey, or even Mrs. Fry to the prisons of the metropolis, to understand that word. Sit down with me amongst the beautiful purple heath, visited by the wild bees, and the blue butterflies ; and breathe the fresh air of our rugged hill, and look on the fairly-extended prospect ; and know that man, the sinner, carries that within him, which, unpurified by God's grace, can defile the fairest scene. The fertile source of all woe springs forth in his heart ; and as I have read,—I forget where—the cross is the tree of healing virtue, which alone can make the bitter waters sweet : Oh ! would to God the secret were generally known ; would to God, all the broken in

heart knew to whom to apply, as the healer of the wound. But so, it is not. Many despair, as Hagar did, when she cast down her child under the shrubs that she might not see his death; who will not open their eyes with Hagar, though the angel of the Lord points them to the gushing water. Oh! it is a melancholy world; there the sick unto death, lie along the road, obstinately refusing to be healed, though there is balm in Gilead, and a physician there.

Then I remembered a story, which I heard when I was a child,—and what we hear as children, we seldom forget,—of one of those broken hearts which would not be bound up: it was of a suicide; and when the coroner assembled his jury, and the oath was to be administered, there was found no book in the house, which they could acknowledge as the word of God. What! not one copy of the good news brought from heaven to sinners; not one

New Testament of Him who longs to be our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? No word of consolation? Oh! what a commentary on that unhappy being's miserable life, and yet more miserable death. No! on that awful occasion the men shuddered as they sent out to borrow a bible; and as they turned a hasty and terrified glance on the pale and bloody corpse before them; the most careless could scarcely fail to feel a wish too deep, too hopeless for utterance,—“That thou hadst known in thy day, the things that belonged to thy peace!” Have I vainly trifled with your feelings; uselessly lifted the veil from so awful a scene? The world in which you live, abounds with such; and my purpose in writing, is to charge *you* to lay hold on the hope set before *you* in the gospel. The wind and the tide may be in your favour now; but you know not in how short a time you may have to say, “All thy billows and thy storms are

gone over me;" "Deep answereth to deep." It may, therefore, not be unprofitable, having gazed for a moment on the miserable wreck, to turn from it with softened and humbled hearts, and inquire how the bark passes the waves of this troublesome world; when

"Hope, as an anchor firm and sure, holds fast
The Christian vessel, and defies the blast."

Do you see those five very tall poplar trees near to the water's edge? A little way behind them, but concealed from us by the rugged side of the stone quarry, is a row of miserable houses,—I will not honour them by the name of cottages,—the wretchedness of whose outward appearance is but too faithful an indication of the misery, and I fear I might add in most instances, the guilt which dwells within. It is truly the worst part of the parish; yet bad as they all are, one at the further end, lower and narrower than the rest, is

the most wretched of the dwellings : and there, bearing for many years, a wasting and painful disease ; enduring neglect, cold and hunger, and one trouble greater than all the rest, with uncomplaining patience ; with a fortitude unadmired by man, but not unseen by angels, nor unapproved by God ;—lived and died at the early age of twenty-seven years, poor Esther. “ The world has its objects of admiration,” says Cowper, in one of the sweetest letters, perhaps, ever written, “ and God has his objects of love ; those make a noise and perish, but these weep silently for a short season, and live for ever.” Such, I surely believe, has been Esther’s enviable lot. She, I doubt not, through much tribulation, has entered into the kingdom of God. Shall I tell you what I can recollect of her story ? Her distresses began early, for her mother died ; and her father’s family presently became the scene of all the confusion and discord which vice and

misrule create. She appears to have been naturally of a gentle temper; and to escape from the daily scenes of violence, which she was obliged to witness, she married very imprudently, when scarcely eighteen years of age. I did not know her until long after this; but all my inquiries respecting her conduct at that time, lead me to believe that although the full power of God's grace, as revealed in the gospel, was not then manifested to her; there was yet in her, as in the young Abijah, some good thing towards the Lord her God. Her neighbours speak of her, as having been peaceable, industrious, and honest; and with regard to her husband,—if deep affection and true faith deserve return,—her husband was heavily indebted to her, and a fearful recompense may be required of him. I will not linger over this part of my story, it is one of every day's occurrence: at first they were happy together, but after a few years, and the

birth of several children, Esther fell into an ill state of health, and her husband became weary of her and neglected her; two of her little ones died, and this distress added to her former troubles, brought on a violent fever. She had no medical attendant, and if her constitution had not been naturally strong, surely she could not have struggled through what she then endured. For five weeks she kept her bed, and was, for many days, entirely insensible; and when she recovered her reason, it was perceived that her arm was dislocated: she was carried to the Infirmary, but so long a time had elapsed since the dislocation took place, that it was pronounced irremediable. She was, however, received into the house; and her cruel husband immediately sold every article of the furniture which her care had hitherto saved from his wretched habits of waste; and leaving their only remaining child, a remarkably handsome boy of about two

or three years, to the unwilling charge of strangers, he went away.

It is well indeed for miserable man, that in his hour of deep distress, he has one to whom to apply, more pitying than his fellow-sinner. "My heart was almost broken, when I heard of it," said poor Esther, "but the Lord does all things well." It was within an evening or two after her admission into the hospital, and whilst she lay thinking, I suppose, of her forlorn and hopeless condition, in the loss of all earthly comfort, and having then but vain and unfounded hopes for heaven; that the chaplain, having read prayers in the next ward, stopped at the stranger's bed. He was one well used to instruct the ignorant, and to comfort those who mourn; yet from Esther's account, I fancy he must have found more than usual difficulty in his first introduction to her. "I thought it very strange and very unkind of him," she said, "so to insist upon it,

that I was a sinner ; I did not then know with what a holy God I had to do ; and I recollect I hoped he would never come again. But he was very patient with me, he came day after day,—blessed be God for it ; and I learnt, little by little, how I was born in sin, and had sinned in thought, word, and deed ; and I saw that there could be only one Saviour, but thank God, I saw that he was mighty to save ! And then, Oh, how I used to long for the gentleman's coming ; and if he could have talked to me all day, I am sure I could have listened : I shall never see him again on earth, but, Oh, dear me ! if ever I get to heaven—” And she would stop abruptly and weep, as if the greatness of the hope had overcome her.

She had been in the Infirmary many weeks, when some one who visited her there, told her that her step-mother was about to place the child in the work-house, as she could not be troubled with him any

longer. "And he is the only one I have left, my beautiful child!" she said, "and I shall never, never see him again;" and she burst into a passionate fit of weeping, which those about her strove in vain to quell. The physicians were kindly anxious to have her under their care yet a little longer; but she would not be detained. They told her she needed constant attention, and her only *chance* of recovery was her patiently remaining under their care. But the mother felt that she had rather die with her child, than live away from him; so she was carried home to the miserable hovel which I have pointed out to you. She left the conveniences and comforts of the well-aired and neatly-arranged ward for the most wretched of beds, and the scantiest and coarsest of food; but happily for Esther she had found, and she carried with her to her sordid home, "the pearl of great price;" and to the uneasy bed on which she was laid, when she arrived

there, and from which she never rose again for the three remaining years of her life, her Lord's comfort while she lay sick on her bed, "Thou, Lord, didst make all her bed in her sickness." Her change of character was remarked, though the reason of that change was not duly appreciated, by the ignorant and careless people amongst whom she resided. She was a new creature, possessed of new motives and new actions; new sorrows and new comforts; a new support through the accumulated woes of life; and an entirely new hope in the prospect of death. Without any outward means of grace, the work of the Spirit of God silently, but rapidly advanced:

"Stillest streams oft water fairest meadows."

"It was wonderful," said one, "to see how she bore her illness; how very patient she was, it was unaccountable to see." Perhaps, few Christians ever were called to a longer exercise of that one grace of

patience. For Esther's troubles multiplied, whilst all her earthly comforts seemed reduced to one single blessing; all that life had of joy to her, centred in her little child. He was a child worth his mother's affection, and he loved his poor sick mother dearly; he was gentle and affectionate, in no common degree; and his beauty resembled what his mother's had been, and she had once been very fair. It needed years of suffering, to mar the form which God had made so perfect; but disease effects fearful ravages in the brightest face; and poverty and want trace the brow even of youth with untimely furrows. The winter came on with great severity; and though fuel is so cheap here, Esther had often to bear cold in addition to her other miseries; often for days together, no one came in to kindle her scanty fire. If there was bread in the room, the child would reach it for her, and divide it with her; and when there was none,—“I have often been very hungry,” said Esther,

“but I thought my Lord would never suffer me to starve, and I believe he never will.” No, I think it is well to take God’s promises literally when we may ; and the rich in this world’s goods cannot, perhaps, fully enter into the preciousness of that promise when literally taken, “Bread shall be given thee.” “Nothing is more easy,” says the venerable Bishop Hall, “than to trust God, when our barns and coffers are full ; and to say, ‘Give us our daily bread,’ when we have it in our cupboard ; but when we have nothing, when we know not how or whence to get any thing, then to depend upon an invisible bounty, this is a true and noble act of faith.” Our poor Esther lived in the daily practice of such faith.

It was on one of the coldest days of that fearfully cold weather, when the ground was frozen like iron, and one could not breathe the freezing air for a minute, without remembering the text, “Who shall abide his cold ;” when the

icicles hung glittering from the low roof of her miserable dwelling, making a strange contrast to all that was dark and gloomy around them; that a neighbour charitably came in to light her fire; and putting the small apartment in better order than usual, left it. It was set in order for a funeral. The child had not stood by the fire a minute, before his thin night dress was in flames: "O Richard, Richard! my son, my son!" shrieked the unhappy mother. She made a convulsive effort to rise, but instantly fell backward; and feeling her utter inability to assist him in his agony, buried her face in the bed-clothes, and lay senseless. The poor infant's cries presently alarmed the neighbours; they put out the fire, but it is needless to record the state to which those few moments had reduced him: he was immediately carried to the nearest hospital. "That night," said Esther,—the ignorant, you know, are always superstitious,—"that night, just as the

clock struck three, I was lying here all in the dark, crying about my poor child; I felt something pass, and step softly on the bed just as he used to do; and I looked up and saw him, and he looked so beautiful, and I was just going to say, 'Is it you my son?' and he was gone!" "Ah!" said I, "when we dream of friends that are dead, they often do appear to us very beautiful." But Esther evidently did not think it a dream. "I did not know then," she said, "that he was dead; but when my step-mother went in to see him the next day, the doctor told her that he had died just at three o'clock,—just when I saw him;" and she raised her dark, melancholy eyes to mine, with an expression which seemed intended to ask, "You do not think that it was only a dream?" But I was sure that a controversy on that incomprehensible subject, the possibility and the probability of apparitions, would be worse than useless; so I generally ended

that part of the conversation, by reminding her, that He who had said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," would certainly not leave her comfortless, though he had taken her last earthly comfort away from her; and that I doubted not her little Richard would look very beautiful when she saw him in heaven: "And I think I shall see him," she would answer calmly, "and my Lord has not left me comfortless."

It was a few months after this heavy affliction, I well remember the day, when we were fully repaid the labour of a tiresome walk, by discovering in poor Esther, —accidentally as it seemed to us,—one of those so exactly pointed out by our Master;—"Sick, and ye visited me,"—"Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me." I well recollect how shocked we were, not so much at her extreme poverty, as at her solitary and deserted condition. Her husband, as if

he had one, and only one human feeling left, had come to look at the child as he lay in his coffin, but utterly neglected the dying mother. Her only support, the pittance which the parish compelled him to allow her, was grudgingly and irregularly paid; yet I never heard her mention him, but with pity, and in a spirit of kindness. The sister who slept with her, left her early in the morning, and returned very late at night; so that, except when a neighbour came in at uncertain intervals, Esther might hunger and none give her bread,—be thirsty and none give her drink. I have several times found her faint, for want of a morsel of food: generally there was none in the room, but sometimes she has said, “There is bread there, but I cannot reach it.” It is sad that such things should be in a Christian country, but I have not exaggerated.

My gentle reader, I fancy you young, healthy, blest with a competent supply of

this world's goods ; and perhaps with what is much more valuable, good sense and leisure. I charge you, as you will answer it at the day of judgment, use these things, for they are "talents." Let there be in your neighbourhood no forsaken Esther to whom you might have ministered. I do not advise you to look for your reward, in the gratitude of those for whom you may exert yourself. I would say,—I believe it is a sentence of the excellent Fenelon,—"*Sanctifiez toutes vos actions, en leur donnant pour motif, l'envie de plaire a Dieu ;*" but I can assure you, that I have found amongst the poor of this place, uncivilized and disorderly as our genteeler neighbours are pleased to account us, an affection which has reprov'd my coldness towards my greater Benefactor ; and gratitude which has made me blush for my unthankfulness. So it was remarkably in Esther's case : "all good things," she has often said, "came to me

in that day, I often think of it when you and that young lady came in first." And really it was astonishing, how many friends we met with for her; one procured her a blanket, another some needful articles of dress; others supplied food; and after much consultation,—for ours is a very poor parish, and we are often obliged to manage in a way which would create a smile in richer neighbourhoods,—we procured her a new bed. The tick was bought by subscription; then doubts arose as to the filling: millpuff was too expensive, and oat chaff not to be procured here; but "necessity," said our old neighbour at the shop, "is the mother of invention;" we begged worn-out pieces of carpet from various persons, delighted the younger children at the school, by employing them to pick it entirely thread from thread; and you would have been surprised to see what very respectable filling it made: and Esther's joy and gratitude for this unex-

pected, but most necessary gift, was such as she could not express, and I cannot describe. "Bless the name of the Lord!" "He has done all things well," were the phrases constantly in her heart, and on her lips. I believe I never, during the two years I knew her, heard her express any thing like dissatisfaction in God's dealings towards her. I never remember her complaining, though, indeed, there was cause of complaint of the carelessness with which her relations treated her. Those who approached her low door, were more than once astonished at hearing within a weak, but not unmelodious voice of joy; for often when alone, she strove to amuse herself by singing the few verses of hymns which she knew; thus beginning in the dark valley of the shadow of death, that song of praise and triumph, which I believe she is singing now, in a very different tone, and under far other circumstances.

But you are getting weary : you think
I have forgotten my motto,

“ Although the day be never so long,
At last it ringeth to evensong.” -

O no ! Esther's day of gloom closed at length. Her daily bread was provided to her to the very day on which she died. I saw her on a Saturday ; she was wasted to a state that it was melancholy and humiliating to see. Some such form, perhaps, presented itself to Milton's mind's eye, when he described the place,

“ Sad, noisome, dark, a lazar house it seemed ;”

but no pen but Milton's should attempt to describe such a sight. Oh ! blessed are they, who bearing about with them such a body of sin and death ; yet cling with sure and certain hope to that promise, “ It is sown in corruption, it is raised in power.” I recollect nothing particular in our last interview ; she was patiently waiting until her Lord was ready for her ; and though

in great pain and very weak, she smiled affectionately, and even cheerfully when she saw me. I had been intrusted with a small sum of money, on her account; and as I knew some days would elapse before I came again, I went to the kind-hearted mistress of a little inn near, and engaged her to supply Esther with certain articles of food every day, whilst the money lasted. We reckoned it over together; it would provide her with that particular comfort she so much needed, until the Monday week following. "And whom shall I ask next?" I thought: nay, take no thought for the morrow. Monday week came, and Esther had thanked God for her last meal. On Tuesday morning we heard the bell toll for her. She had been no worse; had suffered no more than usual: her Father's still, small voice had said, "Come!" and she was gone home. What matter if the traveller's scrip is empty, when the sunset shines on him, as

he ends his toilsome journey, and enters his own father's house?

Ah! it is time for us to think of our walk home; for the sunset shone on us long ago, and the silver mist rises, tracing the long course of the river in the low grounds beneath us. Come through the corn fields, the rustling of whose ripening ears, once more reminds us of His faithfulness, who promised that seed time and harvest should never fail;—down our own hilly ground, between the moist willows, and up the bank again into the home field: and as we enter our silent garden, we cannot forget to take one look at the glorious jessamine. It is fifty, perhaps, sixty years old; and covers a great part of the south wall of the house. Just now it is in most luxuriant blossom, having lit up its ten thousand stars, and opened its stores of incense to greet us and the harvest moon; for the jessamine you know is a night flower. If we come to-morrow in the sunshine, we shall scarcely be able to

gather one perfect spray. How gracefully it wreathes round the casement window ; and hangs its light sprays about the low, heavy door. No, you need not open it ; we cannot go in to business, and candle-light yet : come through the little white gate ; the moon shines on the polished laurel leaves, and on the white holly-oaks ; the stately lilies are gone ; but this high path is my favourite evening walk still : for see how beautifully the light and shade are thrown on that group of trees, behind which the church tower rises. There are heavy clouds, but they are flying away before the clear night wind ; and the few stars, and the full moon shine in their most perfect brightness. " How beautiful is night !" and yet this is the evening of what I called " a Day of Gloom." O how mercifully God teaches us to seek peace in his word, and in the contemplation of his works ; there, and there only it cannot but be found. Hush ! listen ! the wind is still at this moment ; you may hear the distant

chime of musical bells ; they sound at this hour every evening. In one minute, our church clock will strike nine ;—there it is, we must go in now : “it ringeth to even-song,” and after prayers, I will show you some lines which though they are not exactly suitable to my subject, yet have occurred to me so often, when I have walked here at evening, that now I scarcely ever do so without thinking of them :—

THE BLESSING AFTER SERVICE.

I was within a house of prayer,
And many a wounded heart was there ;
And many an aching head was bowed,
Humbly amidst the kneeling crowd :
Nor marvel, where earth's children press,
There must be thought of bitterness.

Oh ! in the change of human life,—
The anxious wish, the toil, the strife,—
How much we know of grief and pain,
Ere one short week comes round again.
Bend every knee, lift every heart ;
We need God's blessing ere we part.

Then sweetly through the hallowed bound,
Woke the calm voice of solemn sound ;

And gladly, many a list'ning ear
Watch'd, that pure tone of love to hear ;
And on each humbled heart, and true,
God's holy blessing fell like dew.

Like dew on summer's thirsty flowers ;
On the mown grass, like softest showers ;
On the parch'd earth like blessed rain,
That calls the spring-bloom back again :
Oh ! to how many a varied sigh,
Did that sweet benison reply.

“ The peace that God bestows,
Through him who died and rose ;
The peace the Father giveth, through the Son,
Be known in every mind,
The broken heart to bind ;
And bless ye travellers, as ye journey on ! ”

“ Ye, who have known to weep
Where your beloved sleep ;
Ye, who have pour'd the deep, the bitter cry !
God's blessing be as balm,
The fever'd soul to calm,
And wondrous peace each troubled mind supply. ”

“ Young man whose cheek is bright
With nature's warmest light ;

Whilst youth and health thy veins with pure blood

“ Let the remembrance be, [swell ;

Of thy God blest to thee,

Peace, passing understanding, guard thee well.”

“ Parents, whose thoughts afar,

Turn where your children are ;

In their still graves, or beneath foreign skies ;

This hour God’s blessing come,

Cheer the deserted home,

And peace with dove-like wings around you rise.”

“ Ere this week’s strife begin ;—

The war, without, within :

The triune God, with spirit and with power,

Now on each bended head,

His wondrous blessing shed,

And keep you all, through every troubled hour.”

And then within the holy place,

Was silence for a minute’s space ;

Such silence, that you seem’d to hear

The holy Dove’s wings hovering near ;

And the still blessing far and wide,

Fell like the dew at evening tide ;

And ere we left the house of prayer,

We knew that peace descended there ;

And through the week of strife and din,

We bore its wondrous seal within !

A TALE OF LOW LIFE.

“ Alas in the depth of the human heart,
What agonized thoughts are nurst ;
What life-linked ties may be rent apart,
Ere ever the full heart burst !

Then who shall tell in those few short hours,
What anguish that true heart bore ;
Till the frail form bent like a riven flower,
And the broken heart bled no more.”

I HAVE a story to tell you, and I know of exactly a fit spot in which to tell it. We have not been a long walk for some time ; and the rain has laid the dust ; and the heavy purple clouds hang about the sun, so as to cool and temper his rays—not to conceal—scarcely to dim them ; for they stream through, edging the purple with the brightest silver ; and lighting up

every tower, and hill, and tree ; and taking notice of every separate leaf, and burnishing every little wing in the gnats' unnumbered army, that rises and falls, and wheels forward and circles backward, with orderly, yet incomprehensible motions.

The wild roses are hanging in long garlands, the full-blown flowers pale, and the buds red ; and the starry elder with its broad white blossoms, and its green of every varied shade grows beside it, in the lanes through which we must pass. And there are wide grass meadows, where the old elms stretch their broad branches ; and the aspen trembles in every lightly hung leaf ; and the weeping ash, and the silver birch, those beautiful sisters, rise arm in arm, each bending to look at the other in the quiet stream. And there we shall find wild flowers in abundance : the medicinal comfrey with its rough leaf, and its little clusters of purple and white bell-shaped blossoms, of which the bees are so

fond ; and the yellow hawk weed ; and the vast variety of snap dragons, from the bright crimson which loves the sunny wall, to that little delicate one with its purple brown leaf, and its purely white blossom, tipped with clear yellow ; which we shall meet with, springing from the dewy moss in the freshest shade. The blue bells are faded ; but the *ragged robins*, as we used to call them when we were children,—and I know of no other name for them now—supply their place well ; and there are the fox-gloves, the stately fox-gloves, six feet high, with more than an hundred bells ; what a peal that must be, if they ring out altogether at midnight, when the fairy queen passes ; and there clings the bright-eyed pink vetch, and the golden cinquefoil ; and there, dearest and loveliest, close by the water's edge, that most popular of all flowers—the forget-me-not. Its form is elegant, and its colour, true faith's own ; yet it is by plea-

sant association that we love it so well. And that is a charm which all field flowers have in some degree ; and by which they are compensated for the want of that superior beauty and fragrance which their delicate sisters of the hot-house and greenhouse,—those fine ladies amongst the flowers,—possess :

Mine be the flowers that freely blow
In each uncultur'd spot ;
Anemone, with leaves of snow,
And blue forget-me-not.

Give me the wild thyme and the heath,
Because their blossoms wave
On battle fields, where rest beneath—
What true hearts ! in their grave.

Where Alfred fought, the same flowers bloom
On each embattled hill ;
There the wild furze and golden broom
Wave glittering banners still.

And bring those lovely, gentle things
That deck our church-yard way ;
The soft grass, whence the violet springs,
And cuckoo flowers of May.

There is a spell around those blooms,
Own'd by no rarer flowers ;
They blossom'd on our fathers' tombs,
And they shall grow on ours.

To us, as to our sires, their tone
Breathes forth the same glad strain,—
“ We spring to life when winter's gone,
And ye shall rise again !”

Uncultur'd, round our path they grow,
Start up before our tread ;
Perchance, as they did long ago,
Ere some dear friend was dead.

The fox-gloves in the sheltering wood,
Say, “ Here he used to hide ;”
And primrose whispers, “ Thus we stood
All blooming when he died !”

Thus every wild flower's simple leaf
Breathes in its native vale,
To conscious hearts some record brief,
Some true and touching tale.

Let the conservatory stand,
I own their foreign claims ;
Those glorious flowers from other lands,
Rare plants with wondrous names.

Ye trembled in our martyr's field,
Beneath the torches' glare ;
Sprung from the turf where Falkland kneel'd,
As now ye blossom there.

Ye in our childhood's garden grew,
In our young brother's bowers ;
My English heart beats high to you,
My own wild English flowers !

So having paid my respects to them, we will proceed ; under these almost horizontal branches, where the banks rise so perpendicularly, that the roots of the trees are far above our heads ; into the low field where the stream is crossed by one of the most picturesque of bridges. There is scarcely any charm wanted ; for the buttresses show their grey stones, in some places, through the wreathing ivy ; and finding nourishment enough for itself, in the loose earth between them, springs a small and very graceful yew tree ; and there also grows ash and alder ; and the little antirrhinum hangs there, its long fes-

toons of tender green leaves and diminutive lilac flowers strung on its most slender stem. And there grows the wall-fern, ripening its innumerable seeds from their unseen blossoms on the under-side of the leaf; and there bright "with nature's varnish," the hart's-tongue: and not one leaf, nor one flower, nor one tinted stone in the small arches; but you see it reflected—so still, so pure, is the stream below.

But come, the sun has no very long journey to take; and I have a story to tell you, before we turn homewards: let us cross the bridge, and scramble—it is really a scramble,—over the bank, and up into the little copse on the opposite side the stream. We are not breaking bounds, for difficult as the path is, it is evidently in constant use; so our consciences may be easy on that score. Set your foot firmly on these contradictory brambles, and spring to that bank of soft, red, yielding mould, as steadily as you may; and

now one effort more,—mind the briars,—and then down the bank, and here we are; and this is beautiful. Here is the softest velvet under our feet, and the greenest canopy over our heads; and we ascend a narrow and very winding path; sometimes passing round the fantastic roots of old trees, which had grown old and begun to decay before we were born, and which yet may weather many a winter storm after we are quiet in our graves; and from the fine mould in the crevices of the bark, grow the most minute and beautiful funguses and lichens: and sometimes our feet sink in the deepest moss; and then again, we have to climb over huge stones, tinted with many colours, which have at some time long ago, been precipitated from what was once a stone quarry above. Here is nature's home. The trees grow here, where she planted them; some rising up in stately and proud beauty, and others throwing themselves entirely across the

stream, as if impatient of their separation from their opposite companions; and there is the wild clematis, wreathed as nature wreathes it; from one shady branch to another, till where it gains the free air and the sunlight, it shall shine with a crown of silver blossoms. And now look up, from the image of that proud rock in the silent water,—up through the young red leaves of this old oak tree; and the scented flowers of the woodbine which has clung to it in storm and sunshine so long, and so faithfully,—up through the living branches, to the pale blue sky, across which, the purple and grey clouds of evening are sailing so majestically; and own with me how beautiful is that scenery which God has made, and which man leaves alone.

But now,—for the mind may become luxurious, as well as the body,—I am doubting whether the sad tale of low life, which I have to tell, is in exact unison

with the quiet, the purity of this scene. It is not pleasant to turn, in such a place as this, to the consideration of common misery and vulgar distress; and yet, alas! when we draw from the life, such things must constantly present themselves. It is not pleasant,—yet an heathen poet having discovered that he, being a man, could think nothing belonging to man uninteresting,—it is not surely for Christians to turn with a disgusted ear, from the “natural sorrow” incident to their fallen human nature; not for Christians, since their divine Master dwelling in the perfection of unapproachable light and beauty, condescended for their sakes to become acquainted with the details of a life of poverty, and the pangs of an ignominious death. With these considerations, then, sit patiently down by me, on this moss-grown branch, and listen to my true story.

It is almost two years since, that the

secretary of our little Society was applied to, for relief, by a young woman, whose appearance certainly spoke of any thing but want. She was dressed more smartly than most servant-maids, even in these days. The tasty straw bonnet, gaily lined and trimmed, displayed under its spreading front, a double row of edging, and yet gayer ribbons on the cap; and the long ear-rings—whether they were gold or not, I cannot tell,—danced and glittered as she moved, as brilliantly as if they had belonged to a titled lady: her shawl, green and red shaded silk, was pinned so as to display to advantage, a stately and finely-made form; and she moved as one who was conscious of her superiority. Yet if the gaiety of her dress, (very unfit, truly, for her station) and a certain haughtiness of look made an unfavourable impression; it was done away in the moment in which you heard her speak. Her voice was clear and sweet; and her bright hazel eyes looked

down upon one, with an expression of humility, when she asked her favour, which, though her appearance altogether led you to suppose they had little used, yet became them well. She was not a native of our parish; the propriety of her mode of expression, even more than her slight Welsh accent, forbade our thinking so for a moment. Her face, as well as her figure, brought to mind some of Westall's beautiful and majestic Jewesses: the strong outline of regular features, the arched and dark eye-brow, the quick eye, the proud curve of the upper lip, the rosy colour of the clear brown complexion; forming altogether a style of beauty, which in a woman, we are, perhaps, more apt to see with admiration than love. "How very handsome she would be thought, if she were a lady," we said, "and Sir Thomas Lawrence had painted her portrait; and Heath or Danforth had engraved it for one of the *Annuals*." It was strange that such

an one should need the homely assistance we could supply ; and our secretary paused a moment, as she looked at the recommendatory ticket, sent by a liberal subscriber. " Had she many children ?" " She had lost some, but had only one living." " But her appearance,—really the secretary doubted, was afraid, it was a very poor society ; and what it could afford, would be scarcely worth her acceptance." " She would very thankfully accept the smallest gift ; times were not with her, what they had been." Again the secretary glanced at her dress : " Had her husband employment at present." " Her husband"—the poor young woman's voice failed her, and she burst into tears,—“ he was very good to her, very kind ; he had always been so, but now—” Our kind-hearted secretary was moved : “ Times were bad,” she observed ; and though in her heart she had quarrelled with the long ear-rings, this burst of natural tenderness

had overcome her feeling of disapproval ; and she promised all the Society could supply, as soon as it should be needed.

I cannot tell how long it was after this, that we heard Martha was very ill. From the description, we were sure it was the same young woman, whose appearance we had thought so striking. She was at lodgings at the bottom of the fields, and there we went to seek her. "Your lodger is ill," I said to the mistress of the house, a very untidy woman, who sat idly by the ashes of a grate, at which three or four unruly children were lighting shavings. "Your lodger is ill, I understand;" but I stopped as I looked at the shattered window, the dirty floor, and the miserable furniture ; it is not surely possible that noble looking young woman should live here. "Martha has my upstairs room," said the woman, as I hesitated,— "I'll show you up, if you please:" she did so, and I was glad to find that Martha's apart-

ment was in far better order, than that of her hostess. Yet it was only by contrast that it bore any appearance of comfort. The grinding of the sand, with which the floor was strewed under our feet, was a sad sound for a sick person's ear ; and the low fire had an appearance mournful rather than cheering, as the cloud of smoke issued into the room, in answer to the draft from the door. Besides Martha had been taken ill so immediately on her coming, that there had been no time to unpack or arrange her few articles of furniture, which for the most part stood piled against the wall. And there was no one on whom she could rely for help ; she was far away from all her kindred : Oh ! there is a charm in that word ; others may be charitable, strangers may oblige us, but in the hour of distress, it is to a mother's voice that we would unhesitatingly listen for comfort, and on a sister's arm that we would rest with confidence.

I looked towards the bed ; was it possible that such a change could have taken place in so short a time ? Could sickness have done it ? Not sickness alone. Grief and care make fearful ravages, even when health and ease of circumstances struggle against their effects ; but when they come in the hour of nature's trial, what wonder if the faint heart sinks under them ? Such a wreck, so sudden, so entire, I never saw before ; I trust never to see such again. Terror and sorrow had done in one fortnight, the work of years. The bright eyes were sunk and dim ; the lips were parched, and the finely-formed cheek was pale and hollow. Oh ! how those expressive words of the Psalmist were whispered in our ears, with a fearful repetition : " When Thou with rebukes dost chasten man for sin, Thou makest his beauty to consume away. Man in his best estate is altogether vanity." Poor Martha evidently remembered us as we drew near

the bed ; but she could not speak without an effort which it seemed almost death to her to make. With a trembling hand, however, she lifted up the coverlid, that we might see her infant ; but when we made the customary remarks on its healthy appearance, and expressed the usual good wishes that it might live to be a comfort to her, she did not smile. From her, all earthly hope seemed to have past for ever. Her husband, so I learnt from the neighbours, had, as she said, always been kind to her ; and she took pains to deserve and to keep his affection. But I fear neither of them knew that “ except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it.” The fairest fabric of earthly happiness, unless founded in the fear and love of God, is but a house built on the sand, which the first storm of temptation will cause to fall. A time of distress, such as our young people had never before known, came on ; labour was scarce, and

provisions were dear; and it was said that Thomas made use of dishonourable means for supplying their necessities. It was said so, yet there were those who had known him a long time, and who still expressed entire dependence on him: and perhaps, I can scarcely judge; yet I fear the suspicions entertained against him, were but too-well founded. This much I know, no man's morals, be his rank in life high or low, are to be depended on, in a time of trial, except so far as the grace of God upholds him; and Thomas knew nothing of that only refuge in the day of trouble. Are any disposed to say that they are "not as other men are?" At any rate, let them add with the pharisee, "God I thank *thee*;" and those who only hope to plead "God be merciful!" will at least feel compassion toward a fellow-sinner. The poor wife heard the news that her husband was thrown into jail suddenly; and the effect of that news was fatal to

her. She made an effort to visit the prison, and when there, she was almost happy, for she was with him; and it was not till she was sternly ordered to leave him, and she returned to her lonely room, that she felt the extent of her misery. Her illness came on, but her only exclamation during her hour of agony, related to her "poor husband!" Her infant was laid beside her, but no smile of welcome beamed upon it; and when the nurse told her it was a fair child, her only answer was, "fairer, if her poor father could see her!" Her strength failed, for she lay awake hour after hour, and night after night; and when, at last, nature was completely exhausted and she slept, her dreams seemed to be full of fearful and mournful images, for she started often, and often wept. "You have been asleep a long time," said one who stood by her when she awoke: "Yes," she answered, "I have been dreaming all night long of my burying, and that

Thomas might not come to it;" and she burst into tears, and wept again. "If any one ever died of a broken heart," said the doctor, "she will." Oh! it was a melancholy sight to see,—a fine, healthy, beautiful creature, thus in the very pride and prime of life, brought down to the brink of the grave; not by a sudden stroke,—for the young tree that is felled, falls with all its graceful foliage, and all its thousand blossoms, and in all its beauty,—but like one shivered by the lightning; in one moment, indeed, and yet every leaf seared, every spray withered, and every flower fallen, before the axe of the woodman cuts down the towering forester.

But with her bitter tears, other thoughts came. She was a sinner, a dying sinner, she said; Oh! who would come and show her the way to heaven. She listened to the beautiful fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and seemed to feel that He, of whom the Prophet spake, was bruised for her iniquities; and she responded with a fervent

assent, to the Psalmist's expression of humiliation, contained in the fifty-first Psalm. She accepted gratefully, though with a dull and dying ear, and with exhausted attention, the kind instruction administered to her, by one able and willing to give comfort and advice. Ah! why had she not sought it before? Why had she not listened in the hour of her health? Nay, that is no question for us. Have we not ourselves "pulled away the shoulder, and stopped the ear, and refused to hearken?" It becomes us thankfully to take our station, *now*, in the vineyard; but to bless His mercy, who calls even at the eleventh hour.

It was the evening of an October Sunday. The red leaves yet danced, rejoicing in the mild air; and the yellow sunshine smiled on the last flowers of the year: the daisies sprung amongst the long grass on the graves, as freshly as they had done in May; and the last degenerate crop of golden-cups and starwort glittered as if to

show how fair their predecessors had been. The congregation was dismissed, for the afternoon service was ended, and the parting blessing had been given; but there still remained two or three scattered groups. There were mothers who came to return thanks for their deliverance from their "great pain and peril." Little children brought to be washed in the water of baptism, and presented in faith and hope, to their merciful Saviour. Grave fathers thinking, perhaps, of new exertions to be made in answer to the calls of an increased family; and young sponsors, serious, yet evidently pleased with their interesting office. I left my accustomed seat, and went, as I sometimes do on such occasions, into the gallery behind the font. I was alone. The christening parties went into the vestry, and I sat looking on the empty seats and the silent aisles, which, as the evening closed, became every moment more and more dim. The rising wind in the

tossing chesnut branches, was, for a short time, the only sound I heard; and then a light was placed on the communion table, and an orderly party knelt at the rails, and there arose a sweet, clear voice of praise and thanksgiving. It ceased, and the train moved down toward the font. There was the priest, in his simple dress of "linen, clean and white." Long may such a dress be a meet emblem that thy priests, my country's church! are "clothed with righteousness!" And when he had taken his station at the font, the light which was needed, and yet which struggled imperfectly with the fading gleam of evening, shone on a varied and pleasing group. The elder women's scarlet cloaks formed a bright contrast to the long white robes in which the infants were arrayed; and the mothers, and the young female sponsors wearing their best,—light cotton gowns, silk shawls, and new straw bonnets, formed, for a poor country parish, a very

gay assembly. Do not quarrel with my word,

"The innocent are gay,—the lark is gay."

I assure you, that as the service began, there was a silence which spoke of the mind's attention, and of the heart's prayer.

The priest took one fair child after another in his arms, "received him into the congregation of Christ's flock, and did sign him with the sign of the cross;" and one mother after another stepped tremblingly forward, and took her own precious one, and folded it to her heart; feeling more than she had ever done before, all the depth of a mother's love, and pouring on its young head all the fervency of a mother's blessing. There was a pause, and two or three persons dressed in shabby mourning, which had evidently been worn for many a relation, and many an acquaintance before,—brought to the font, an infant, whose sickly form, and weak, moan-

ing cry, told more than the narrow band of crape round its cap, or the rusty black shawl in which they had wrapped it, a tale of "father and mother's forsaking." It might be fancy, but I thought the tone of tenderness, in which the minister had addressed each unconscious child, as it lay in his arms, was yet more tender, when he looked on this one. The mothers, I thought, gazed with deeper love on their own happy children, as the cry of this little motherless one reached their ears. The fathers looked graver, and there were tears in the young women's eyes :

And well the gathering tears might start,

As they nam'd the infant's name ;

Whose mother had died of a broken heart,

From mourning its father's shame.

Poor little thing ! it was come into a troublesome world, to be sure ; it was tossing on rough waves, but the frail bark was soon to be in port, where no storms come. The woman whom the parish

officers engaged to nurse the child, proved extremely careless of it; and the next thing we heard, was, that in consequence of her neglect, it had met with a frightful accident; and the overseers removed it to another nurse. Having heard thus much, I could not of course be surprised, when passing one winter's day through the church-yard, I saw a little, narrow grave, dug in the part called the poor's ground; and heard upon inquiry that it was for Martha's child. It was buried that evening. No knell had tolled for it when it died, no mourner stood by the grave; the nurse brought the unornamented and nameless coffin under her cloak, and there was no pall to cover it. It was of little moment; the grass and the spring violets grow there, in token that being "sown in weakness, it shall be raised in power;" and the spirit so forsaken, so lonely on earth, found, doubtless, a bright and innumerable company to welcome it at the gates of heaven.

A PARTY OF PLEASURE.

“Les plaisirs sont les fleurs que notre divin maitre,
Dans les ronces du monde, autour de nous fait naître,
Chacun a sa saison.”——

I DID not mean to have written another page ; but I am afraid you will accuse me of melancholy, and indeed, that has unavoidably been the character of my two last chapters. I should be sorry to leave you with this impression. There is enough to make us sad in this world, to be sure. We know it is a wilderness ; yet even in a wilderness are some wild flowers, some touches of beauty, such as only the hand of a divine artist could leave there ; some bursts of sunlight streaming from heaven, through the brambles, and across the waste, lighting up the rough stones, and painting

even the heavy drops of the last storm with the colours of hope's rainbow.

Peace is always offered to our acceptance ; happiness, I believe, generally is so ; but for pleasure, there is only a little time. That little time, for once, we found yesterday. We put into execution a plan which had been long in agitation ; though our scheme was simple enough, one would have thought, to have been accomplished on the same day in which it was first thought of. But half the pleasure of these country adventures consists in overcoming difficulties ; and inconveniences not to be borne at other times, become then, but fertile sources of amusement.

In the spring, we talked of making a party to the woods and the mill ; but the spring past, and the showery summer was stealing away, and I thought, "we shall not go this year." At last, however, the day was fixed ; but then, in a climate like this, who is certain of the weather, one

hour before another ; “ Certainly,” we said as the clouds gathered, and the hail beat down on the days previous to that of our appointment, “ we shall not go on Tuesday.” But the moment the sun shone again, we observed how much more beautiful the country appeared under such circumstances, than in any other, and remarked how much we enjoyed

“ That beautiful, uncertain weather,
When gloom and glory meet together.”

But then, let the weather be what it might, some of the party could not walk so far ; and where in the world, (in this parish, I mean,) should we look for a conveyance. There is our own little open cart, indeed ; but though we do travel in it to the Dorcas meetings, on a dark winter night, that is no reason why we should choose to ride in it at noon-day, especially through so very genteel a village as that to which we are bound. There is no vehicle in the

parish at all suitable, to be had for love or money: to be sure Haynes the cobbler has a curious *shandridan*, sometimes open and sometimes covered, but it is a chance if that is at home. It was at home, and willingly lent on the occasion. Yet when it stood at the door with its flapping sail-cloth covering; when we saw how low it was, and considered how crowded the inmates must necessarily be,—the only two seats where either air or light were to be obtained, being those for the driver and his companion; and they, with all their advantages, could not hold up their heads, because the tilt was so low; I really thought the whole party would be disposed to walk: nothing, however, was farther from their intention. Four of them, besides shawls and provisions, and the pretty fair-haired lass who was to act as driver, were already stowed in; and assured me, when I came to the door, that two or three more might find ample room. But sun-

shine, light and free air ; Oh ! how well they are worth having, so I joined the walking party. They drove down the steep, stony lane, that we pass at first setting out, steadily enough ; the horse wondering, I suppose, at his unaccustomed load, and feeling his way most circumspectly, having, said one of the party, “ a doubt on his mind which side he ought to take.” Afterwards, however, when we lost sight of them, I fancy they drove on, more triumphantly ; for when, having crossed the fields, we met them at the stile ; they were going on at a gallant rate, the two in front looking exceedingly merry ; and little William peeping out at us from under the covering behind,—(the fastening of which had been jolted out of its place,)—and laughing with all his might.

It was a sweet afternoon for the scenery of those quiet fields. A narrow stream runs through them, shaded on either side by varied and picturesque foliage of many

trees. Among them some particularly fine silver-leaved willows, contrast well with the darker hue of other branches ; I have admired them often before, but I never thought them so lovely as then. We went to the very spot from whence Danby's interesting view was taken : Oh ! he forgot nothing, there were the same wild flowers, the very leaves of that water-plant, nay, the same lichens on the same stones. It is by entering into the minutiae of things ; by condescending to detail, that descriptions either in writing or painting touch the heart. Man's life—woman's life, at least, is made up of trifles ; the fount of feeling lies deep, yet it is usually one simple recollection, one household word, that, as with a magic spell, will send the bright and clear waters forth from the hidden fountain. So I thought, I recollect, as I looked at that exact picture, and so I felt again as I traced the original scenery ; and remembered the many pleasant hours

I had spent there, in days that are gone. It cannot be helped, it must be so in this fallen world; the shadow of the grave passes us in our brightest moments; in our gayest and loveliest circles, are vacant places for the dead and the absent; and when we listen to the sweetest and most beloved voices, there is often a still whisper in the sinking heart, reminding us of some voice to which we may not listen. So it was even then. We are content that it should be so; here is not our rest!

Our companions had left their carriage at the inn, and were waiting for us at the bridge. We followed the course of the quiet stream through many pleasant fields, and met with some new wonder at every turn: here we stopped to admire the purple eyes on the pinions of the peacock butterfly: there were wreathes of wild convolvulus, bearing a greater profusion of its spotless blossoms, than we had ever noticed before; I fancy they like these

stormy summers as well as I do : and as we were looking at the reflection of some tall purple flowers in the clear water, the large dragon-fly glistening with its green and gold, diverted our attention ; reminding us of Mrs. Hemans's beautifully descriptive lines ;

—————" Brightly free
On filmy wings, the purple dragon-fly
Shot glancing like a fairy javelin by—"

Further on, were a group of snow-white ducks, and purple-headed drakes, as happy, as full of life and glee, as Southey's* mountain geese, and wanting nothing but such a description, to make them as interesting. Many a quiet green nook we past, where a poet might muse away the long summer's day ; and many a spot was pointed out to us, on seeing which, an artist might well thank God, for the ability to pursue his delightful employ. Presently, we past

* See Southey's Colloquies, vol. i. p. 146.

the ruins of a house which, some time since, had been burnt; and we could not but remark the beauty of the gay Indica roses, which clustered round the discoloured door, and over the shattered windows. "There's a subject for you," said some of the company, and I versified it accordingly.

See, where around yon ruin grey,
In beauty mantling its decay,
With glossy leaf and fragrant flower,
Bright as if wreathed round festal bower,
The faithful rose springs forth to tell
"How firm her heart, who loveth well!"

'Twas night, and flaring up the sky,
The fearful fire blazed wild and high;
And before morn, the dwelling lay
A ruin, desolate and grey;
Then did the rose her flowers renew,
To weep its fall with tears of dew.

No careful hands support her stem
Ever, so rear'd, so nursed till then;
No maiden comes from out her bower,
To tend and watch the favourite flower;
Or in the summer's drought to cheer
With sprinkled waters pure and clear.

Yet there, neglected and alone,
Still wreathes the rose, that ruin's stone ;
And ever, as the breezes sigh,
Passes the faithful mourner by,
The listener hears affection's vow,—
“ I lov'd thee once—I love thee now.”

“ Thy walls deserted and decay'd,
Still from the noon-day heat I shade ;
And still in earliest hour of spring,
Round thee my fairest boughs shall cling ;
Still bear I to thy shatter'd door
Flowers, as in happier days I bore ;
And to the winter winds I tell,
How firm her heart, who loveth well !”

But we have no longer light and sunshine, until almost nine o'clock. There is an autumnal freshness in the evenings now ; and if we intend to drink tea in the open air, it is high time to settle where it shall be. It was of little consequence where ; all had brought with them a disposition to be pleased. Yet when we arrived at the spot which was, at last, appointed, we could not but feel that where God had

made things so lovely, man must, indeed, be ungrateful not to enjoy and to admire. It was a strangely beautiful spot which we had chosen ; the wood rose almost perpendicularly in front of us ; and from a fantastic rock garlanded with ivy, and decorated with long leaves of lady-fern and hart's-tongue—which graceful themselves, always delight in wild and uncultured scenery,—sprung forth, drop by drop, a little stream of the coolest and purest water, dripping down into a natural basin, worn in the rock beneath it. It was a spot on which you could not look without longing to know what was the old legendary record respecting it : connected with so fair a fountain, there must surely be some tradition. Was it dedicated to the holy mother herself, or to some inferior saint ? And were not these grey stones worn in old time, by the feet of the pilgrim who came hither to pay his vows, or to be healed of his malady ? Were

there ever such beings as fairies? Hush! dont speak so loud, unless you are sure there are none such now; for if there are, here is the very place, on this mossy bank, when the glow-worms' lamps are lit, that they hold their moonlight revellings. I cannot tell how that may be; but certainly, I thought, as I turned again to look at the clear water, here the wounded doe fled, when the hunter's shaft had reached her; and here, perhaps, in after days, paused some loyal cavalier, when hot and weary, he withdrew from the field, where he had fought so gallantly, and with so little success; and unbinding the heavy helmet from his aching head, blessed the coolness of this welcome stream, and the shadow of this quiet wood.

Happily those times are past; yet the fountain has very constant visitors still, and we are even now standing in the way of one of them. "Come little Anne, fill your pitcher, and get tea for us as soon as

you can; and bring the table and chairs out here on the green bank; we are quite ready, we shall only cross the light foot bridge, and stay down there until you call us, listening to the waterfall." With that sound, another and a sweeter mingled. It was a clear voice of song; the words were beautiful, and the music, I believe, quite equal to them; of that, perhaps, I cannot judge. You who were my companions in that pleasant excursion,—and it is chiefly for your amusement that I have written these pages,—know how much we enjoyed that strain; and how well it accorded with the scenery, and with our feelings. You know also how kindly the minstrel repeated his song after our merry tea-drinking was ended: and you will acknowledge that when people are disposed to be amused, it is wonderful what strange sources of amusement they discover. We wanted more butter, had not brought enough bread, and our knife was blunt;

and we were unweariedly watched by a great quiet dog, who begged us with a most touching expression of countenance, for what we were so ill disposed to spare. You know with what regret we turned, at last, from the beautiful scenery, and set out on our journey homeward ; taking in our way, the silent path through the woods, and climbing the steep, from whence we had a view of the grand and castellated mansion of the noble owner. You who rode can, I dare say, tell how commodious you found your well-appointed equipage ; and I can answer for the pleasure of the quiet twilight walk ; the beauty of the dark outlines of trees and hedges which we passed ; and the pleasure with which we trod the last stony and steep path, because we knew it led homeward ; and how, above all, we enjoyed the stillness of our own sweet garden, as the door opened to the touch of the accustomed latch-key ;—our garden perfumed, as it was that night,

with the scent of autumn flowers, and its old trees wreathed with woodbine and clematis, amongst whose yet unblossomed, but tenderly green sprays, the last roses are clustering. It was a pleasant scene, and combined, with the remembrance of that which we had been visiting, to prove that unworthy as we are, we are dwelling, like the Israelites of old, in "a land which the Lord our God careth for; the eyes of the Lord our God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year, even unto the end of the year."*

* Deut. xi. 12.

August 25, 1830.

CONCLUSION.

" Ah ! dearest mother, since too oft
The world yet wins some Demas frail,
Even from thine arms, so kind and soft,
May thy tried comforts never fail !

" When faithless ones forsake thy wing,
Be it vouchsaf'd thee still to see
Thy true, fond nurselings closer cling ;
Cling closer to their Lord and thee."

KEBLE'S CHRISTIAN YEAR.—*St. Luke's Day.*

IT is time now for us to part ; yet before we do so, let us take one more turn round our pleasant garden, down the steep trelliced walk, and along the path on that side the house, which the grafted pear tree nearly covers. The busy day is done, we hear no sound, but the hum of the beetles as they pass us ; no other living thing is stirring. I beg your pardon, old

grey tabby, you are there, are you ? You always walk up and down with me in the still twilight, and I own I am very ungrateful to forget you. The last ray of evening sunshine has faded away ; and the last light rests on the young and polished leaves of the laurels, and on the stately blossoms of the fleur-de-lis. Do you not admire that princely flower ? And was it not very fit for the purpose to which it was applied, in the days when the elected king of old France was chosen with the shout of an hundred clear voices ; and the waving of an hundred good swords, the weakest of which was “strong to turn the flight,” raised amidst his nobles on no other throne but his father’s broad shield ; and no other sceptre for his hand, but his country’s native flag-flower ?

Let us cross the grass, and pass by the graceful Persian lilac,—stoop under the hanging boughs of the quince tree ; and seat ourselves for a few minutes, on the

step of the old cross : and you will ask me, perhaps, what is the age of this grey stone, and who raised it ? And wherefore was it raised in what was once the depth of a forest ? Tradition tells of a knight, who dying far from home, begged to be buried in his father's grave ; so those who stood round his bed, when his confessor had received his last sigh, closed his eyes, and straightened his limbs, and wrapped him in his winding-sheet ; and set off in dark and sad procession, bearing him over hills, and up steep and stony vallies, a long and weary way, till they came at night thus far through the forest, and here they halted ; and the requiem was sung : and where the corpse had rested, there, next morning, they built a low cross for his soul's health ; and the stone on which you are seated, is the only one remaining. Such is tradition's story. I cannot tell who was watching the gallant knight's return to his distant home : I know not how

long his mother had waited, looking out at her window, and chiding the delay of his chariot wheels ; or whether his dark-eyed sisters, and his young bride had finished the broidery which described his conquests, and which they were so soon to lay aside, or to spread as a pall over the cold corpse. I cannot tell—but of this I am sure, if he, at whose desire that cross was built, really feeling himself a sinner, had grace given him to look through the countless forms and errors of his imperfect religion ; and to turn for safety to that cross in which St. Paul gloried ; it is all well with him. We have been brought up to a purer worship ; let us consider how we have improved our privileges. It is an interesting story. How would it tell in verse ?—

What is there in that shapeless stone,
With lichens and with moss o'ergrown,
That bids thee, traveller, stay ?

No sculptor's art, with choicest care
Has traced Corinthian beauty there,—
Why tarry on thy way ?

The sun, that wakes our primrose flowers,
Has seen as gay a race as ours,
Now to their graves gone by ;
And yon rude stone bids memory tell
How, from the bower of Isabel,
The Spaniard came to die !

She stood at his side, in her pleasant bower,
The Lady Isabel ;
The iris gleamed in the sunbeam shower,
She looked pale, yet bright as that trembling
As he bade her a last farewell. [flower,

“ Lady ! farewell ! the evening breeze is sighing
Along this cool and willow-fringed shore,
The nightingale her hymn to eve is trying,
Together we may hear that sound no more !

“ Lady ! farewell ! the blessed summer eve
Wakes with its gentle breath our orange flowers,
Those flowers shall fade and flourish, but I leave—
For ever leave—my native Spain's fair bowers !”

The Lady gaz'd on his shining eye,
The Lady Isabel ;
On his noble forehead, pale and high,
But his sunk cheek flush'd, and told silently,
That he bade her a last farewell !

Paler his cheek in our chilly air,
His brilliant eye waxed dim ;
And strangers smoothed the damp dark hair,
And composed the weary limb.

And vainly the learned leech had striven
To lengthen his life's short day ;
But the priest the weary soul had shriven,
And it longed to fly away.

And "Thanks," he said, "for the kindly tear,
And thanks for the gentle tone,
Yet I would not rest amidst strangers here,
But with Isabel my own !

"As ye would rest with your fathers brave,
Would sleep where your mothers lie ;
For His sake who only our souls can save,
Bear me home to Spain,—to die !

“ It may not be, this fluttering heart—
This trembling—this faintness tell—
Father ! pray for the soul, that so soon must part,
And the corpse bear to Isabel.”

That eve he died ; and at early morn,
Whilst the dawning was still and grey,
Forth was the worn-out body borne,
And the long train moved away.

They moved along over plain and steep,
Through valley, and moor and fell ;
Till they came to the forest's dark shadows deep,
In the King's Wood where hunters dwell.

On the damp dark boughs shone the moon beams pale
As they waved in the midnight wind,
And the priest's psalm rose on the chilly gale,
And the corpse was borne behind.

Just on this spot, by a dark oak's shade,
(A lone wild place was here,)
The requiem they sung, and the prayer they pray'd,
At the side of Don Juan's bier.

And next morning this rude stone cross they built,
On the spot where the body lay ;
That the traveller might think how Christ's blood
And tarry awhile to pray. [was spilt,

A purer worship hast thou been taught ;
But yet, from this ruined stone
Turn not, until thou hast raised thy thought
To the Cross as thy trust alone.

And here, as I am on the point of taking leave of you, allow me to advert to the principles which I have expressed during our interviews. If there has been any pride in the spirit with which I have expressed myself ; any bitterness towards those who differ from me ;—I am sincerely sorry, such a feeling should have been apparent to you ; by me, certainly, it was not intended. Such a feeling, I am well aware, is utterly unlike the spirit of the Master whom I profess to serve ; and hers, through whose ministry, I was

brought to Him. But whilst my prayer, with regard to my country's church, is only

“Not drougt on others, but much dew on thee;”

whilst I recollect that she bore me, a senseless and helpless thing, in her kind arms to my Saviour, at my baptism; that the hand of her blessing has been laid on me, and on the heads of those most dear to me, in the holiest hour of their lives; that month after month, I come, a faint and weary pilgrim, to receive from her the cup of her Lord's blessing, and his broken bread, to strengthen me in my journey; that the voice of her consolation has sounded to me, from the graves of my well-beloved; and that she cheers me with the belief, that I, at last, shall rest in Christ, as my hope is, that my brethren do:—when I think of all this, can I feel coldly towards her? No, God forbid! And you, whoever you

may be,—whatever your principles are, you would not, in times like these, respect me for shrinking back; you cannot but feel that through good report and evil report, a daughter's heart must cling to her mother.

But the dew is falling, let us rise and walk on. The blackbirds have finished their evening hymn; and the redbreast, who has been so busy, attending on his nestlings ever since the dawn of day, is, at last, resting on the ivy spray above his nest. It is all quiet: the beautiful yellow moths pass us with an uneven motion, like the leaf of a blossom, carried by a soft wind to sleep on the moss; and the whirring of the beetles' wings, only serves to remind us of Cowper's line—

“Stillness, accompanied with sounds like these,
Charms more than silence.”——

So I often find it here: but you must go

back into the busy, rude world again ; back to the crowd and the press of life ; to the labour of business, perhaps, or the struggle of ambition, or the whirl of pleasure. Beware, lest you seek the living among the dead : and when disappointment comes, —as surely it must, if you do so,—think of this quiet garden, and the shadow of the chesnut over our low altar ; and come, and learn where peace dwells. But it is duty which calls you to the strife, and the din ; then go and prosper ! Carry the charm of peace about with you. “In the world,” says He, whose word is truth, “ye shall have tribulation :” so you would, if you staid here ; “but in *Me*,”—there is the unfailing spell,—“in *Me* ye shall have peace !”

“There are, in this loud, stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide,
Of the everlasting chime.”

Such be your lot, my kind and patient companion ; we may perhaps, meet again. If not, assure yourself that you bear with you my thanks, and my best wishes.—
Good night.

THE END.

